Studies of Literary Struggle

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SORROW AND SONG:

STUDIES OF LITERARY STRUGGLE.

BY HENRY CURWEN.

"Songs and deeds and lives that lie
Foreshorten'd in the tract of time."

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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IV.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

"In every man of genius there is a little child," and on this childish side of Balzac's character, strong enough in itself, some score of so-called biographers have greedily fastened. They tell us of little but his vanity, his schemes, his extravagances, his debts, his hair, his cane, his trinkets. With them, at best, he is exaggerated into a grotesque epitome of the struggles, aspirations, puerilities of our nineteenth century, and his history is only an amusing medley of gossip and lies and scandals. Few men have been written about so much, fewer still to poorer purpose; and this hunt after the grain of truth, buried in bushels of falsehood, is among the most irksome and ungrateful literary tasks that any writer can endeavour to surmount—not, indeed, that it is always most difficult to manufacture an enticing biography when the evidence against one is the weakest. Balzac, himself, moreover, unfortunately for us, never performed that *toilette à son ombre* which distinguishes too many of his countrymen. He lived apart and lonely, for his works rather than for himself; longing, as few men long, for fame, but it was ever for them, and he deliberately buried

his own private life in silent reserve and retirement. It is only here and there that we can gather up the ends of precious indications of the fierce struggles of his early years, of the mysterious passion that dominated his latter days. But with these and the traces of autobiography, to be had for the searching in his works, and with, above all else, the few letters written to his pet sister, in the very heat and smoke of battle—scarcely, in pluck and pathos, to be matched in any literary life—we are able to promise an enthralling, at all events a chequered, biography.

If it is difficult to gauge the value of the volumes published upon Balzac after his death, it is impossible to accept anything, without the nicest testing, that was written during his lifetime. Probably the best hated and most admired man of his time, he founded a school, even now existing, though degenerate; and he aroused a host of enemies long since dead and forgotten. "The Colossus of Modern Art!" "The Christ of Contemporary Literature!" cried some; "The Historian of Lesbos and Sodom!" howled others—both were wrong, but fortunately the wildest detraction died when he died. The genius of an individual is very apt to be the humiliation of the many so long as he is with them; as soon as he is gone he is overwhelmingly lauded by his fellows, because to him praise can be of no further material use, to them of no further material detriment. A pleasant outlook this for those who fight their lives away for fame or honour! "Who hath it?" as Falstaff asks, "he that died o' Wednesday!"

Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours, on the 16th

May, 1799; an acacia tree, still existing, was planted in the garden; he was baptized after the saint upon whose day he came into the world, and was then boarded out with a healthy young country nurse until he was four years old. He felt very miserable, he tells us, when he returned to a home where all were strangers. They were old-fashioned folks there, and the domestic discipline was of the strictest. For long enough he remembered the tears and the solemn ceremony with which he and the younger ones—two sisters, for his brother was not yet born—came creeping down hand in hand to say "good-morning" and "good-night" in the drawing-room.

Honoré's father had formerly been secretary to the Council of Louis XVI., and was thus brought into contact with all the famous men of the Revolution. Resembling Montaigne, Rabelais, Uncle Toby, in his originality and kindly philosophy, he had one overwhelming idea—longevity—and he believed that by careful diet he might live pretty well as long as he pleased. Reading once of a centenarian's death, he exclaimed, "Now look! here is a man who knew how to live!" but, as it was pointed out that the old gentleman often got drunk and always took supper, he added, "Well, the fool has shortened his life, that's all." The bulk of his savings were, according to his creed, placed in a Tontine Society—the famous "Caisse Lafarge"—of which he was one of the chief directors. But as "he died by accident," in his eighty-fourth year, only twelve thousand francs came to the family out of the immense fortune he had led them to expect; the certain prospect, too, of this fortune had

rendered him venturesome and singularly unlucky in his other speculations.

Madame Balzac, who brought a handsome dower to her husband's speculations, was, though lively and imaginative, a woman of strong common sense and almost Spartan character. All her life was devoted to her children, to their education rather than in kindly words, but this outward severity was probably intended to neutralize the petting and spoiling of the old folk, and had certainly the effect among the children of making them almost entirely dependent upon each other for love and confidence; and Honoré already begun to concentrate his affection upon that next sister Laura, whose encouragement was afterwards to prove a lifelong solace.

It was from the mother, probably, that young Balzac derived his activity, perseverance, and imagination; from the father his originality, keen memory, observant spirit, critical judgment, and love of speculation. Until thirty years of age he was equally satisfied with the name they bequeathed him—simply "Balzac," by which all the family were registered and known. At thirty, however, he took the noble particle *de*, adopted the arms of the more famous family, and more than hinted at them as relatives. This little vanity, insignificant in itself, is a good index to many of his after eccentricities, though soon he had scant need of any honorary prefix. Once a candid friend assured him that he could have no possible connection with the Balzacs d'Entragues. "No?" cried Honoré, "then so much the worse for them!"

But, returning to his childhood, we find him a pretty

little fellow with a clean-cut, smiling mouth, great brown eyes, and thick curls of black hair—always attracting the notice of strangers out of doors, but at home looked upon as an ordinary, as, at all events, an unremembered child—sleepy, dreamful, strange, as were not a few children born in those troublous days. A twopenny fiddle was the first thing that awakened his lethargic mind to outward curiosity—ever after he loved music. Then he learned to spell, and at five alarmed them all by reading the Bible—a forbidden book at that time—openly and everywhere. Next he took to fairy tales, especially those with dismallest endings, which were real enough for tears; and with his books and a crust of bread he would steal away the whole day long to the deep woods beside the rippling river, to dream and read and dream again of the old poetic times. These dreamings resulted in little tragedies improvised for the nursery stage at home. Two events only broke in upon the monotony of this early childhood—a visit to Paris, where he was so petted and fêted that he never forgot it, and the death of his grandfather, when he moped about the house broken-heartedly, and in tragic tones interrupted the games of the younger children, "O think, sisters," he whispered, "of the death of grandpapa!"

In his eighth year this strange, sensitive, dreamy, self-contained little lad, whose education should have had every possible individual care and home thought, was deemed old enough, and strong enough, for a large public school. He was entered at the College of Vendôme, the most famous school in the provinces,

then under the monastic government of the Oratorians. The college, on the little river Loir, was a kind of large fortress, altogether complete in itself, with schools, dormitories, chapel, theatre, bakehouses, sanatorium, and so forth, in its own high, black walls. The three hundred boys there had, as long as school-life lasted, left the world behind. Instead of holidays, they were "permitted to keep pigeons." Relatives were only allowed admission once a year, at Easter, and this to Honoré was always a miserable time. "We saw him only," writes his sister, "upon the prize-day, but, as he never took any prizes, he received more blame than love at this short interval to which he had looked forward with such eager joy."

The miserable system in force here had been invented by the Jesuits, and was well calculated to prevent any formation of character, any independence of will. The freedom and healthy education of the playground was utterly ignored. The boys were incessantly watched, and even taught to spy upon each other. They walked out on rare occasions, but only in rank and file, with a father at their head. There was a father in each dormitory, and they had singly to perform their ablu tions once a day in the one stone basin under his supervision. Friendships were almost forbidden, the pettiest breaches of discipline magnified into unimagined crimes. Even their home letters were as obligatory as the confessional. Their rooms were badly kept, their linen foul, their food detestable. In summer there was no ventilation, in winter no fires, and their chilblained and frostbitten little hands were savagely punished with a leathern

ferule because they could not write, after much formal French ceremony, worse than the licking itself. In minor offences, *pensums* (or "lines"), served to ruin all prospect of playtime. Their lessons were the most pedantic parrot rote.

Of these three hundred lads Balzac was accounted the most stupid; he was certainly the best punished. "He was," says a schoolfellow, "a most self-contained child; dead to all appearances; doing his classics as badly as possible; looked upon by the masters as half an idiot;" "and this," continues Sainte-Beuve, "is exactly what I should have expected; an active imagination, idle, disorderly; a greedy reader; careless of contradiction; loving the marvellous; following his studies wretchedly —in short, a bad scholar, without discipline, whom his masters burthened with *pensums*, and his schoolmates slanged as 'poet.'" This is the key-note to Balzac's reputation here. His brain, excited so early, was too eager for the drudgery they gave him. Then, as now, there was a capital library to which the boys had free access; and his time was spent in devouring science, philosophy, mysteries, religion, even dictionaries. This reading had to be stealthily done — stealthily in school hours for fear of the masters, stealthily out of school, when, indeed, he had time left from his *pensums*, for fear of the boys, who had already discovered some treasured and wretched verses, and had made his life more miserable with the gibing nickname of "poet."

In *Louis Lambert* Balzac has left as vivid an impression of these school days as Poe gave in *William*

Wilson. Round all the truths in both stories there is the same glamour of mystery. "*Abyssus abyssum,*" cries Balzac, "the mind is an abyss that rejoices in depths." It is most interesting to compare these two tales. In both there is a second self, for here the Poet and Pythagoras are confessedly only two phases of Balzac's own character.

"Accustomed to the free air, to the independence of a haphazard existence; caressed by the tender cares of an old man who spoiled him; living and dreaming under the sun, it was difficult, indeed, for him to conform to school rules, to march in rank, to live within the four walls of a great room, where eighty young boys were silently seated on wooden benches before their desks. The stale air injured him physically as well as the want of freedom, and for hours, his left arm on his desk, his head on his left arm, he would gaze away at the green leaves in the court-yard beyond, till the regent shouted out sternly, 'Sir! you are doing nothing, sir!'"

Though this accusation terrified him at the time so miserably that thirty years afterwards Gautier, as a jest, used unexpectedly to mimic the words and cause him to shiver and tremble, Balzac went on in stolid defiance, reading and dreaming over what he read. For with Lambert he cried to his second self, "We, too, shall be famous—we shall be the alchymists of thought!" And like an alchymist, indeed, he had to pass years and years in trying, testing, feeling his unknown way across the smoke and ashes, the sediments and scoriæ of unsuccessful efforts, before his thought became thoroughly

transmuted into the precious metal which all men own as true and golden.

Nor did he merely dream—for reading led to writing. First in the shape of that doggrel verse which the boys and not unjustly, had hailed with howls of derision; afterwards in that famous "Essay on the Will," so lovingly referred to in many of his books. This, in boyish thought, was supposed to fill up, with his own soul-revelations, all the blanks and doubts that Mesmer and Swedenborg and Lavater had left. Not, probably, worth much, to him it was the outcome of all previous study, the one object of life. But his class-mates ferreted this out like the others, and tried one day to wrench it from him. He resisted furiously, careless of the presence of the master, who soon scented a mystery, and seized the papers from him. "Ha! ha! it is for such follies as this that you neglect your duties, sirrah!" and amidst the jeers of the school-boys the manuscript was despatched to the college grocer for ignominious purposes.

This was the end of Balzac's school-life at Vendôme. Maddened with the loss of his essay, and excited by overstudy, he was attacked by a kind of coma—became incapable of attending to anything, and no punishments had any effect. At last, in despair, the authorities wrote home, saying, that unless he were removed at once they feared he would become altogether imbecile.

No one of the family ever forgot the astonishment his deplorable appearance caused in their circle. "Look there!" cried his grandmother; "look! how the schools

return the pretty boys we entrust to them." And there was room for alarm. Pale and lean and prematurely old, staring at nothing with big frightened eyes, he looked like a somnambulist; seemed to hear no questions put to him; never knew what to reply when they asked, "What are you thinking of?" "Where are you?" Madame Balzac came to believe that the masters were right enough in their surmise, but the father sturdily maintained that no son of his could be a fool.

Good food, fresh air, and freedom soon effected a change. His mother forced him away from his dreams to take part in the childish games of his sisters and little brother. Sometimes they were able to keep him away from the river-side, and the deep green woods and loneliness, till he became the gayest and merriest of the party; at others he would silence them suddenly, and speak quite strangely. "Mark you!" he cried to his sisters, "I shall be famous some day." The little girls ran away laughing, telling the grand news to everybody, and for long afterwards they used to bend down before him whenever he was cross, and shout mockingly, "All hail to the Great Balzac!" When he was saddest he used, he tells us, to creep silently into the cathedral of Saint-Gatien to dream there at leisure; and the old, dim-stained glass windows, the mysterious music, the clouds of incense, the pomp of priests and bishops, used to thrill him with weird imaginings; and, as a pendant to the seizure of the "Essay on the Will," the very mention of Saint-Gatien, in after times, brought back all the pure, rapt sensations of adolescent enthusiasm.

Soon he was able to attend, as a day-boy, at the college in Tours itself, and his studies, now carefully watched and directed, were backed up by private tuition at home. In 1814 his father's business called him to Paris, and then young Balzac was sent to another boarding-school, which he liked scarcely better than the last. "I was only," he writes, "allowed three francs a month for pocket-money, and this scarcely sufficed to pay for the essential pens, penknives, ink, and paper," He could play with no one, for he could buy none of the thousand implements of boyhood; he could only envy others as he sat solitary, reading, dreaming, scheming, uselessly under the lonely tree in the playground. "They gave me nothing from home. When they knew that I was fed, clothed, gorged with Latin and crammed with Greek, the whole question was resolved. During my school-life I have known some thousand comrades—but never one subject to such indifference."

In 1816, Balzac came home again to follow the course at the Sorbonne, where the eloquence of Guizot, Villemain, and Cousin inspired him with a new enthusiasm for learning, which overbrimmed when he came back to the little family circle, to dazzle his sisters with the marvels of the morning lectures. His mother, too, urged him on, shared all difficulties with him, so that in the daytime he had scarcely an idle moment. Even his intervals of of leisure were spent in supplementing study by reading at the public libraries, and, as he went to and fro on the quays, he bought all the books which his luncheon money or his savings permitted. Busy as he was all

day, he still found time for his grandmother's "boston" and whist-tables every evening, and here, in spite of his absence and pre-occupation, the good old soul took care that he should win wherewithal to pay for the books he most wanted.

At eighteen he took his degree as *bachelier ès lettres*, and his father began to have faith in his future, "though," says Balzac, "I was always only eight years of age to my father." In M. Balzac's eyes there was only one profession worthy of an educated man. "No one's education," he used to declare, "is complete unless he knows all laws, ancient and modern, especially the laws of his own country." This was a hobby almost as strong as longevity, and there was no gainsaying him; so young Balzac was perched for eighteen months upon a stool in the office of a M. Merville, where his fellow-clerks were Scribe and Jules Janin, who shared his opinion about law, or, indeed, the opinion of Doctor Faustus centuries before:—

> "This study fits a mercenary drudge,
> Who aims at nothing but external trash,
> Too servile and illiberal for me."

But Balzac's law studies were not really wasted—nor his hate of them. His notaries are among his most life-like figures. A third of his plots depend upon some interest which no one but a trained lawyer could ever have unfathomed.

He left this office to join a notary, one M. Passey, whose fortunes had been originally established by M. Balzac's interest. Here he lived in the *entresol* above

the office, but this propinquity, with all his midnight studies, never prevented him from being the latest arrival in the morning. Still, M. Passey liked him for his own sake, and for his father's; and when M. Balzac lost considerably in two important speculations, he proposed to eventually retire in the youngster's favour.

From this kindly offer came a fearful domestic explosion. M. Balzac was, from his altered circumstances, compelled to quit Paris, and as Balzac was now almost twenty, his father summoned him to a formal family meeting, including a trusted family friend, and there and then laid the offer fairly before him.

"I can't be a lawyer," said Balzac. "I care for nothing but literature!"

Everyone was horror-stricken.

"Are you a fool?" asked the father.

"No! I have thought it out well for years. I must be an author."

"It seems," said the mother, "that monsieur has a liking for misery."

"Yes," added M. Balzac, "there are some people fit for nothing but to die in the workhouse."

"Honoré!" urged his mother; "our plans are all settled for you. As a notary you . . ."

Balzac shook his head gravely.

"But, my poor boy," cried his father, "do you know what an author's trade is? In literature one must be either scavenger or king."

"I will be King!" said Balzac.

Aghast as they were, he stood firm to his word In

all our present studies we have met the same family reluctance. In different ways we have tried to explain it. Here, more than elsewhere, it was justified. Save in an eager love for reading, Balzac had shown no literary talent whatever, no literary taste. Even now he could not tell them what his plans were. They argued with him hotly, till the "family friend" lost patience. "Honoré is fit for nothing but a copyist," said he. "The lad has a good handwriting. What else has he? Get him a berth as a temporary clerk in a government office, and you have him settled for life."

This the father declined.

But the mother cried, "Try misery! Let us leave him to starve alone. That will bring him to submission!"

"Let him have two years of probation," said the father, "to test his new career if he can;"

So they quitted Paris for Villa-Parisis, after installing him in a miserable attic, fitted with nothing but bed and table and chairs. They allowed him about three pounds a month, and left behind an aged family servant to watch over him at a distance—and, as she was eighty-four, she confined her attentions to a distance.

We find him now half an outcast, but over-brimming with health—with a glow in his brown cheeks, a merry sparkle in his changeful, big brown eyes, perched in his little attic, 9, Rue de Lesdiguières, so as to be close to the Arsenal Library; eager to fight misery with his pen; to produce some masterpiece that should justify his choice, and restore the love of the home-folks. But what to write, how to make a start, able to bring in a sou, he

knew not. It is very hard for a youngster to realize that literature, the highest of all professions, demands an apprenticeship long and laborious as the meanest. At this time, whether he felt it or not, he had certainly no literary gifts; there was, at all events, a wide abyss between thought and form. From his youthful papers he seems to have tried everything, and so unsuccessfully that even in the heat of work he had no faith in his productions. There we have a curious medley—fragments of dramas; catalogues of books, read and to be read; two manuscript volumes of *Philosophical Errors;* a *Romance in Letters;* portions of four unfinished novels; a section of a work on *Idolatry and Natural Religion; Sketches, Characters, Letters on Paris* (with a history); *Letters on Literature,* stupid verses, and so on—about as unprofitable a collection of spoiled paper as well could be. But he never for an instant despaired. After all, he had a room of his own—and, as Gautier says, all youngsters long for a room, just as little boys long to be breeched—a room entirely one's own, with a latch-key, is a sign of virility; it is freedom, independence, love.

"There he sat," continues Gautier, "with a many-pieced great coat wrapped round his legs, an old maternal shawl about his shoulders, a Dantesque night-cap on his head. His coffee-pot to the left of him, his ink-pot to the right, labouring with straining chest and down-bent brows, like an ox at the plough, on the stony, ungrateful ground of thought, not yielding as yet, but soon to be worked into such fertile furrows. His lamp ever glittering, like a bright star on the forehead of the dismal

house; the snow silently descending through the slate cracks, the wind whistling through door and window."

But we need not go far afield for the history of the this most interesting period. Cut off from his parents he had not a friend in the world; all his love and confidence and hopes of sympathy were centred in his sister —for so many years his sole encourager. He tells her everything, chiefly despairs, defeats; but cheerily always, so as not to alarm her overmuch. She alone seems to have had misgivings about the climbing powers of *Iris*, the worn-out old servant, and this is his first reply:—

"Have I a domestic? Verily have I; and with a name as droll as your doctor's man. Mine styles himself *Moi-même*, and a precious bad bargain he is. *Moi-même* is lazy, clumsy, improvident. His master hungers and thirsts, yet the wretch has neither bread nor water to offer; cannot even guarantee him against the wind whistling through door and window; for all the world like Toulou's flute, but less agreeably. '*Moi-même!*' I shout, 'just look at this spider's web, at this great big bluebottle buzzing loud enough to deafen me. Look at the *moutons* strolling up and down my bed, at the floor-dust thick enough to blind me!' The lazy rascal looks, but never stirs; and still, spite all his faults, I cannot separate myself from this unintelligent *Moi-même*."

The next letter follows a scolding from home for the slovenly style of his correspondence:—

"Tell mamma that I am working so hard that writing to you is my relaxation. If I don't punctuate, if I never read over, it is only to make you read them twice, and so

think longer of me. If there is not a woman's *finesse* in that, I'll throw my pen to the dogs. . . . You must know, mademoiselle, that I am economizing now to get a piano. Mamma and you will find one here when you come. I have taken my measurements carefully; if the walls are slightly altered, there will be room enough and to spare. If my landlord fails to understand the reason of this slight expense, why I must add it to the cost of the piano, and then Rousseau's Dream will re-echo through my garret, where, God knows, the want of dreams is pretty generally felt."

"Disastrous news of my household arrangements! work interferes sadly with tidiness. That rascal *Moi-même* neglects me more and more. He won't go marketting now oftener than once every three or four days, and then only to the handiest and worst-found shops in the neighbourhood; the others, forsooth, are too distant, and so he economizes his legs. Thus I, your brother dear (destined to a glorious fame), am already nourished absolutely as great men always have been—that is, I am dying of hunger. Another horror! the coffee makes frightful stains upon my floor, and much water is needed to wash it out. Now water, not naturally ascending to my celestial abode (but doesn't it descend sometimes on stormy days?), I must, after getting my piano, turn my attention to the construction of an hydraulic lift, if the coffee will keep on overturning itself as it just now does."

"With the Tacitus I want, please don't forget to send a *couvre-pied;* if you are able to add the very oldest

shawl I should find it very useful. What, you laugh? It is the only thing I want for my nocturnal costume. I must needs think first of my legs which feel the frost most sharply; I wrap them in my old Touranian great-coat, but the said greatcoat only reaching to my middle, the upper part of my body is sorrily defended, and the frosts attack my brotherly skin—over tender, alas! to resist!—and then the cold has at me freely. As to my head, I count upon a Dantesque night-cap to brave the fury of the frozen winds. Thus equipped I shall dwell very happily in my palace."

Over and over again in Balzac's works we find descriptions of this garret life. In the *Peau de Chagrin*, where the hero, Raphael, is merely another self, he gives the items of daily expenditure:—

"Three sous worth of bread, two of milk, three of sausage meat, prevented me dying of hunger, and kept my brain in a state of singular lucidity. My lodgings cost three sous each day; each night I burned three sous worth of oil. I did my room up myself; and, to reduce my washing to two sous daily, wore flannel shirts. I warmed myself at an average cost of two sous *per diem*. I had clothes, linen, and boots enough to last three years. I only dressed when I went to the library, or certain public resorts. This makes eighteen sous in all, leaving two for unexpected events."

He then describes his dwelling and his life:—

"A garret, looking on nothing but the backyards of neighbouring houses, and on long lines hung with drying clothes. Horrible walls, yellow with dirt; a roof, sloping

both ways, with cracks in the disjointed tiles, letting in glimmerings of blue sky; space for a bed, a few battered chairs, a table, and, just room enough, under the acute angle of the roof, for the piano. For nearly three years [read fifteen months] I lodged in this aërian sepulchre. Without thought of relaxation, working night and day, with such a pleasure that study seemed to me the loftiest theme, the happiest solution, of human life. The calm and silence essential to a student had I know not what of sweetness and intoxication about them—just what love has. The creaking desk on which I wrote, the brown baize on it, my piano, my bed, my chair, the fantastic patterns on the wall-paper—all these, as if instinct with life, become humble and silent accomplices in my future; I used to gaze at them till my soul seemed in them. Often they appeared to speak, ... I slept on my Benedictine mattress, but still woman was my only dream—a dream I tried to clasp, but which for ever eluded my arms. At each conquered difficulty or despair, I kissed the hands of an imaginary being, with beautiful eyes, rich and well-born, who, some day, was to stroke my hair, and say with infinite pity, 'you have suffered much, poor angel!'"

Again in *Fancino Cane*, we have other precious indications as to this life, and to his one amusement:—

"In my attic I worked all night; by day I read in the Library. I lived frugally, accepting all the conditions of monastic life, so essential to students. . . . . One single passion drew me from my studious habits, but even that was a study. I used to go about watching the

manners of the *faubourg*, its people and their characters. As ill-clad as the workmen themselves, and as careless of all decorum, they were never on their guard against me, so I could mingle in the crowds, watch their bargains, hear their disputes as they came back from work. With me the power of observation was already intuitive, penetrating the soul, without neglecting the body, seizing upon outward forms so thoroughly that it instantly went beyond them—till I had the power of living the very life of the individual I was gauging. . . . . And, as I listened, I seemed wedded to their life. I felt their rags upon my back, I walked with my feet in their tattered shoes; their desires, their wants, all passed into my soul, and my soul passed into theirs. It was the dream of a waking man. I fumed with them against the tyranny of workshop overseers, against their harsh task-masters, who perpetually postponed their wages. To quit my own belongings, to become another than myself by excitement of the moral faculties, and to do that whenever I willed it—this was my sole distraction. To what do I owe this gift? Is it second sight? Would the abuse of it lead to madness? I have never fathomed the cause of this power. I have it; I use it; that is all."

Balzac half apologizes for this solitary relaxation as being in itself a study. We should rather think it was a study, for this longing to read men instead of books, to paint them as he saw them and as they were, was the first germ of his great life-work, the *Comédie humaine*.

"Society," even at this early time, he cries, "shall be

itself the historian, I nothing but society's private secretary; in drawing up an inventory of its vices and its virtues, in collecting the chief facts of the passions, in painting its various characters, in selecting its principal events, in composing special types of homogeneous characters, perchance I may succeed in writing the history that historians ignore—the history of manners."

And what, he asks with reason, would we not now give for such a history of Greece or Rome, of Tyre or Persia?

Still he had to wait long years before the accomplishment of his dream. For some time still, as his early books shew, he knew nothing of society as a unit, little of man as an individual, but his marvellous geographical detail was surely due to this early passion for midnight rambles. It was picturesque old Paris with winding streets and overhanging houses, inviting barracades, that he best loved to paint. To him it was a living being. "O Paris!" he cries, "whoso hath not admired thy sombre passages, thy luminous vistas, thy deep and silent alleys, whoso hath not hearkened to thy murmurs between midnight and two o' the morning, wotteth nothing of thy true poetry, of thy strange and mighty contrasts. It is only for zealous worshippers to know thee well: a marvel to others, to them thou art alive. Every item of man or house is part and parcel of the cellular tissue of this great courtezan—thou art an ocean where all may dive, and yet all find fresh, new corners."

To Balzac Paris was a place of gloom and glamour, of sudden surprises and infinite mystery, of wonderful

shadows and lights; crime and poverty jostling worth and wealth, and ever changing places with them; maddest ambition, with individual will and concentrated effort, gaining all things; all things leading to money, which was the one aim of man, as pleasure the sole prize of woman. And behind these routine lives, there were secrets dark as the grave, for their passions were as playthings, their pleasure faces only masks. Yet here was an epitome of all ages, an epitome of the present world —art, beauty, joyousness, novelty, fashion, whatever men trifle with and women worship, waiting for the highest bidder. Paris was a hell, but hell the only place worth living in, and of this hell Balzac vowed to be the Dante.

From his youthful history we can scarcely see how this wonderful knowledge was acquired. From first to last his life was thoroughly æsthetic and chaste. None of his friends ever heard him breathe more than one sweetheart's name—his life is almost—not quite—played out without the help of woman. Yet look at his knowledge of the sex. "Where," asks Jules Janin, "has he gained his knowledge of women—he the anchorite? Attired or in *negligé*, he is equally familiar; he dresses her, he undresses her." What was this intuitive power? "I have it; I use it; that is all."

He practised this æstheticism as strongly as he preached it. All young writers, he urged, should live two or three years upon water and spare diet; should go to bed at six and rise at midnight to write their best work then, and, in the daytime, should do all the

mechanical drudgery of studying, note-taking, revising, proof-correcting; should live in the most absolute chastity. "Have a sweetheart," he says, "see her half an hour each year; write her as many letters as you will, that will form your style, and style, as Buffon says, is man."

But after all, these midnight studies now commenced were quite as fatal to his life, though certainly not to his works, as the worst and vilest excesses. Henceforth he went to bed, as he says, at six, after a scanty dinner, chiefly fruit and vegetables; rose at midnight, and as, naturally, he was terribly lazy, he drank strong coffee all night through to keep his mind alert; and this, with his vigils, would have undermined the strongest constitution. On the other hand, like Goethe, and Heine, and Victor Hugo, he hated tobacco, though not tobacco smokers, After seeing something of his habits, we return to the confidential letters to his sister for a picture of his daily life :—

"At number nine, in our street, a poor boy's brain has been set aflame, and all the firemen cannot put it out. This fatal deed was done by a beautiful woman, all unknown to him, but rumour says, she lives with the *Quatre-Nations*, at the end of the *Pont des Arts*. She styles herself Glory. And the worst of it is that the burnt boy will argue, and he says, 'whether I have or have not genius, I must in any case prepare myself for many a grief. Without genius I am scorched everlastingly. I must pass a whole lifetime in feeling unsatisfied desires, miserable jealousies, pitiful pains. If I have genius, I shall be persecuted, calumniated, but then

I know that Mademoiselle Glory will dry my tears indeed!'" . . .

"I have dreamed that after the toilsome winter I have just passed, a few days in the country are almost necessary. No! indeed, mamma, I don't say this because I want to escape my struggles, and poor food (*ma bonne vache enragée.*) I love them all; but when any one is with you, you say that exercise and the open air are essential to the health of a man! Now, as Honoré may not go to his father's, why should he not go to that Monsieur de Viller's (a firm and only backer) who loves him, poor rebel, well enough to sustain him in his purpose."

At present, however, these Spartan parents were hard upon Balzac. He had done nothing, proved nothing; they thought he was idling; they would neither receive him at home, nor suffer him to write to M. Villers. However, wounded now, as he must have been, he kept his sorrows to himself, and tried to take his family into the confidence of his future plans, for at last he was able to tell them definitely what he was actually doing:—

"I have chosen the subject of *Cromwell*, because it is the finest in all modern history. Since I have considered the theme, and weighed it well, I have thrown myself headlong into it. Ideas overwhelm me, but I am incessantly interrupted by my want of talent in versification. Still the great Racine took two years in polishing *Phèdre*—two years! two years! But as two thousand lines are wanted in a tragedy, imagine my reflections. Pity me! What say I? No, pity me not, for I am happy. Envy me rather, and think of me often! . . . But how

sweet it is, while labouring night and day, to associate my works with those who are dearest to me. Ah, sister! if heaven has endowed me with any talent, my greatest joy will be in seeing my glory reflected upon you! What happiness to conquer oblivion; to make the grand old name of Balzac once more famous. My blood boils at the thought. Whenever I have a grand idea, I seem to hear your voices crying—'Courage, brother! forward, forward!'"

"Ah, sister mine! What torments I suffer! I must petition the Pope for the first vacant martyr's niche. I have just discovered that my Regicide is faulty, and overburthened with weak lines; so to-day I am a true *Pater Dolorosa* (*sic*). If I am only a sorry poetaster, I had best go hang myself. . . . Still I must make the work successful, and have, cost what it may, something actually completed when mamma asks for an account of my time. I pass all my nights in working, but never tell that to her, or she would surely be uneasy. Such pains for the love of glory! Long live the grocers, hang it! They sell every day; every evening count their gains; delight them sometimes with a frightful melodrama, and then are happy as can be. True, but they pass their time among soap and cheese. Long life rather to the men of letters! yes, but they are empty of money, and rich only in the Morgue. Bah! let both do what they like, and long live all the world!"

At last he is able to forward the plan of this precious tragedy, but in great confidence, for the letter is headed, "for you only":—

"It is no trifling present, no small proof of affection, I give you here, in making you assist at the birth of a genius. (Are you gibing, eh?) As it is still only a project, I leave a margin for you to inscribe thereon your sublime observations. But spite of this permitted liberty read with respect, mademoiselle, this masterpiece by Sophocles Junior. To think that one may read in an hour what has taken years to write. . . ."

Then comes the synopsis, certainly not worth following: "and then the gallery, moved to tears, will go home to bed. Have I talent enough? I mean my tragedy to be the breviary of peoples and of kings. I must begin with a masterpiece, or twist my neck off else. I beg you, by all sisterly love, never tell me 'it is good.' No, point out only the faults; as to the beauties, I know them all by heart. If, as you read, any happy thoughts come to you, write them in the margin; let pretty thoughts go by, I want nothing but sublime ones. . . . It is impossible but that you find the plot superb. How splendidly it unfolds! how it increases in interest from scene to scene. . . . There are a few faults still; they are slight, I can soon make them disappear. Oh, if I listened to myself I could cover reams of paper in writing to you, but, Cromwell! Cromwell! hark, he is calling after me!"

Poor boy! but then he lived alone in his attic, with Laura as sole confidant and correspondent. There is no craving in a young writer so intense as that for sympathy and encouragement. It is so hard to live for ever with all hopes and dreams and thoughts clenched up tight

within one's self. Through the gloomy years of apprenticeship and defeat, there must, strong as a man's purpose may be, there must be despairing moments when—bearing the indifference of the public, the paltry successes of mean rivals, the trade fortunes of weaker men—the gibes and distrust of friends, will almost murder him. Then how poor he was, "Alas! I have eaten two melons . . . I must atone for them and live for three days on dry bread and water." And how grave, too, even in his pleasure walks :—

"I have abandoned the Jardin des Plantes for Père La Chaise—the Jardin des Plantes is too sad. In my walks in Père La Chaise, I find good, solid, inspiring reflections, and I make studies of grief suitable for Cromwell. True sorrow is so difficult to paint; one wants so much simplicity. . . . There are decidedly no such beautiful epitaphs as these—*La Fontaine, Massena, Molière.* A single name only to say everything and to make men dream. . . . The biography of great men will be to all time the consolation of mediocrity."

"The time I spend here will be a source of pleasant memories. To live as I fancy; to work according to my likings and my taste. If I wish it, to do nothing; to sleep upon a future that I make as beautiful as I can; to think of you, knowing that you are happy; to have Rousseau's Julia for mistress, La Fontaine and Molière for friends, and the Père La Chaise for a garden! Ah, if this could only last for ever."

We might think it strange of Balzac—a great prose writer, but never anything but a prose writer, and of the

most realistic school—to turn his first thoughts to poetry, to tragedy of all else, if it were not a notorious fact, as we have tried to show elsewhere, that every writer begins to prattle in verse, as every child first opens his eyes towards the light. Of the mystery of poetry he had no idea, not the remotest appreciation—was as colour-blind to it. Like most literary men, he read everything, and cared for nothing much. He praised the *Méditations* and the *Orientals*, extolled Racine, because he too had excelled in painting women; and there his enthusiasm for poetry was pretty well bounded. In time he came to know this, came almost to despise an art of which he was incapable. He accosted Gautier, in later times, with the grand idea of a comedy. He would write it in prose, and Gautier should turn it into verse. Gautier trembled, but he shivered when Balzac added, "Let's see; now how many lines do you think you can bring me every evening?"

At present, however, Balzac still dreamt that he was full of poetry. He had sworn to "begin with a masterpiece that should be the breviary of peoples and of kings," and in April, 1820, *Cromwell* was finished. For the first time for sixteen months he was summoned home to read it out in the little family circle.

He thought his life was in it. He began nervously, then warmed to hot enthusiasm, and ended wearedly, for he could see that all, even his pet sister, were against him. When the reading was over, they gave their verdict singly. The old family friend said, "Make him a copyist; he has a good handwriting—what else has he?"

But his father proposed a more competent judge—an ex-professor of the *Ecole Polytechnique*, and Honoré accepted the arbitration. After much conscientious study, the old scholar sent his fiat:—"The author may perhaps be good for anything else; he is certainly worth nothing in literature."

"Tragedies are not my *forte! voilà tout*," said Balzac, acknowledging his fate and eager to be at work again.

But his father saw that he was thin and pale and miserable, that all his good looks were gone; and he forbade him to go back to his attic, and kept him at home for awhile. Probably, too, the three pounds allowed monthly formed now an important item in the family's reduced expenditure.

Balzac's return after this sixteen months of attic life was like that other return from Vendôme. But surrounded by domestic cares and comforts, he began to write anew—now with no thought of fame or phantasy; in the simple view of money-making and independence. During the next five years he produced forty volumes—twenty novels—of the kind we know as "penny dreadfuls"—tales of pirates, witches, oriental gnomes, pale maidens, and so forth. But he had no sort of faith in his works, never dared to sign them, save under some guarded aristocratic pseudonym. Such matter was saleable, at a price—the first bringing in two hundred francs—to petty publishers and wretched vampires, who sucked all young talent into their pestiferous circle; stifling genius, if any existed, so as to turn their victims to

readier use; keeping them as near starvation point as might be to hinder them from ever rising, and to ensure the most possible matter, written down to the vilest tastes, at the lowest possible price; cheering them amid starvation with the hope of a glorious future, and themselves faring sumptuously by pandering to the vicious, by corrupting the young. Such wretches are not confined to Paris.

A friend of Balzac has drawn a lively picture of one of these vampire publishers. He had heard of the author's first little success, and had made up his mind that if he could buy a four-volume novel for fifteen hundred francs that the bargain would be grand. "Anyhow not more than fifteen hundred!" he cried, starting to seek his author. The street was so wretched that a thousand francs appeared enough, and the outside of the house told him that even less than that sum would be generosity itself. The atmosphere was so close and foul and infected that another two hundred were put aside, and, by the time he reached the sixth floor, he was so out of breath that he knocked off fifty for each flight. The furniture was dreadful, the author so pale and haggard and pitifully attired, that there were tears in the publisher's eyes and a trembling in his voice, when he offered three hundred francs for the *Dernière Fée*. The reduction had been logically effected in his mind:—"The poor young man has no carpet under his feet, consequently no upholsterer's bills. He lives, alas! on the sixth floor and his rent must be little or nothing. He is so thin that I fear he can have no appetite. His clothes are ages old;

see what it is to be free from a tailor. It is December, but he has no coal merchant's account to settle. What a grand young man is this! how might he be upheld as an ensample to all our sons! I dare not take upon myself to ruin him! If I offer too much maybe I should injure his self-pride. I would seem to suppose that he had ruinous tastes, disordered manners, indignant creditors, dishonoured debts. He would be justified in kicking me downstairs. No! I must study delicacy and offer something in proportion to his wants—and that not at once." The *Dernière Fée* appeared, and was successful after its kind. Balzac went to draw the money and found that he owed four hundred francs for his own corrections, which, indeed, always cost him much of his bargains. "A dozen more triumphs like that," he cried, "and I am eternally bankrupt!"

But these volumes were scarcely worth much. The conscientious Sainte-Beuve was one of the few who had courage enough to read them. He found no originality, no style, no indications of genius, not even of talent; and Balzac's private opinion was the same. "Nay, don't read it," he said to a friend of his of one of them. "I have so many romances in my head which I think are good, but I cannot get them out." In after times he kept them all handsomely bound in a locked bookcase, which he would never open. "They are only my studies," he used to say. Some fifteen years after they were written, and when he was famous, these forty volumes were purchased by a speculator for ten thousand francs under the express stipulation that Balzac's name was not

to appear. The wily publisher, however, issued them all as by "*le plus fécond des romanciers.*"

We have to turn again to the letters addressed to his sister Laura, now that she was married and away, to see how he hated this work, and why at all he did it :—

"I can neither think nor work, and still I must write —write every day and all day, to conquer the independence they refuse me ; to strive to become a free man by dint of romances; and such romances ! Oh, Laura, what an end to all my plans for glory. With fifteen hundred francs a year certain I could keep on working towards fame ; but time is wanted for such labours, and in the meanwhile one must live ! and to gain independence I have nothing but this miserable means. Have at the press then, luckless author ! and make it groan—groan ! ah, never word so true ! "

"If I do not gain money quickly the spectre of that situation will reappear. I cannot be made a notary now, for M. T. is dead, but M. (the 'old family friend') is perpetually seeking a berth for me somewhere—a terrible man that ! Reckon me as dead if they clap on an extinguisher like this. I should become a mill-horse, doing his thirty, forty, rounds an hour, eating, drinking, sleeping by pre-arranged rules—and they call this mechanical rotation living ! this inevitable recurrence of the same things. Still if any one would only throw some charm over my cold existence ! I have none of the flowers of life, and yet I live in the season when they should flourish ! To what good fortune and delights, when my youth shall have passed away ? What matters the dress of the actor

if he is never to play his part? The old man is as one who has dined, and who watches the others eat—and I, a youngster, why! my plate is empty and I am hungry! Laura! Laura! will these two only and immense desires of mine—to be celebrated and to be loved—will they never be realized?"

"I send you two new works. They are still very bad, with very little of literary talent. In one of them you will find some passably droll pleasantries, and some attempt at character—but a detestable plot. The veil never falls unfortunately until after the printing, and, as to corrections, I may not dream of them—they would cost more than the book. The only merit of these two romances is the thousand francs they bring in, but the sum is payable in bills at a long date. Will they be met? All the same, I begin to feel and know my strength—and, feeling what I am worth, to sacrifice the flower of my ideas to such absurdities! Is that not cause for tears! . . . . Believe me, sister mine, for I am in sad want of one believer, that I do not despair of being something some day. For now I can see that *Cromwell* had not even the merit of being an embryo! that my romances *ne valent pas le diable*, but still they are not so ambitious."

As a witty friend said, Balzac had now made "forty assaults upon fame, and had had twenty horses killed under him," and in 1825 matters again came to a crisis.

In the family there were grave doubts and anxieties. He was now six and twenty—an age at which men begin to long for an established future, for home-life, for

womanly help in struggle, for prattling voices round them. Balzac, moreover, was sick of fighting so sterilely for fame and fortune, and, a man of schemes if ever there was one, wealth was, after fame, the strongest idea in his life. He lent a willing ear when one day his father summoned him. "You must see, Honoré," he said, "that all your efforts to make a name in literature are fruitless. You are six and twenty now. You have no position. You cannot keep yourself. What will become of you? Look your future in the face and think it over."

Balzac could not but agree. After grave thought and discussion his father urged that if he would still be connected with literature, it were better to publish than to write—people would pay for books in print if they would not pay for them in manuscript. A friend offered to lend fifteen hundred francs, and, eager as ever, he started in business, determined to regenerate France by issuing one volume editions of the best authors, so cheap as to be within the reach of all, so good that no one could afford to be without them. Two volumes appeared (La Fontaine's works and Molière's) but the booksellers looked coldly at him as an intruder, were dead against the movement, would not take a single copy, and as his little capital did not allow him to bring them otherwise before the public, he was not able to sell twenty copies of either in the whole year; and like our own pioneers of cheap books—Constable and Knight—he came to grief. But his fate was sealed from the first. No real man of letters has ever made a successful publisher. No successful publisher has ever made a man of letters, for Tonson and Moxon and Atticus were the sorriest dabblers.

The money was absolutely lost, but the friend, hoping to save it, threw good capital after bad; introduced him to a relative who had made a large fortune in printing; advanced fifteen thousand francs himself, and persuaded the family to contribute double that sum from what would have been Balzac's fortune upon his mother's death.

Shaking off past evils, he was hopeful as ever, for had not Richardson, he asked, the most popular English novelist abroad, been a printer before him? So in August, 1826, he entered into partnership with Barbier, a penniless but experienced printer. The agreement was signed for twelve years; less than twelve months was enough to utterly ruin him. He worked hard, however, not quite giving up literature; and once more he felt independent, for again he had rooms of his own.

The Government printing brevet cost fifteen thousand francs; they paid thirty thousand for the plant, and, as they printed pretty nearly everything that came to hand without inquiring into the credit of their customers, they were soon on the road to ruin. They saw this, and boldly determined to launch out. A grand chance, as they thought, occurred of adding a type foundry to the other business, and this they were able to attain. For some months they held on, and, curiously enough, the only two successful books they produced were *The Art of Not Paying One's Debts without Spending a Single Sou, taught in Ten Lessons*—an ominous title somewhat—and *The Art of Tying the Cravat in all Manners Known and Used*, attributed by many to Balzac himself.

By this time they were ready to look out for a third partner, or for money on mortgage. Neither could be had. Balzac appealed to his family, showing them that the business was perfect, and just on the turning-point. For months they made continual sacrifices, but frightened eventually by the absorptive nature of the concern, they cut off further supplies at a most critical moment, and Balzac saw bankruptcy staring at him. He could not, as he says elsewhere, be "a thief under the miserable shelter of the law," but took the first offer that came, and the purchaser speedily made a large fortune. But the sale-money did not nearly liquidate his debts. To save the honour of the name, his mother advanced what was most essential, and henceforth figured as chief creditor.

So much for business projects! Without a penny in the world he had to start anew, weighted with a debt of fifty thousand francs. "Printing," he said, "has taken so much from me, it must needs give something back." And he writes, "I willed with my goose-quill, my ink-pot, and a few handfuls of paper, to liquidate a debt that was to me immense; to do that in a town where talent is less necessary than favour; and, slaving night and day, I was able to gain six thousand francs a year—I who owed eight thousand annually as the interest of my debt. A folly this, eh? I entered into the struggle at the very time when one of my friends blew out his brains for a less matter than mine."

This debt was the beginning of the disasters that decided all the misery of his life. It became a sacred

duty, dominating his future terribly, and often rendering him a mystery to those who were not in the secret. But he never for a moment thought of escaping it by bankruptcy. Henceforth he had to waste as much energy and intelligence in battling with misfortunes as in writing the *Comédie humaine* itself. From 1827 till 1836 he dragged on life, and staved off this debt by drawing bills incessantly renewed. Difficult enough to borrow from Jews on the prospect of literary work, these perpetual renewals would have been an impossibility had he not been able to fascinate even money-lenders. "What a waste of intelligence and labour," he would sigh as he came back from an interview, broken with fatigue and disappointment. Of course this floating debt, as he called it, grew like a snow-ball, till liquidation seemed almost impossible. The more menacing creditors were appeased by prodigious efforts of work, and the date-list of his books traces pretty accurately the worst periods of his financial troubles. With a wild joy he knocked off one cipher after another. "After all this labour when shall I have a sou for myself?" he used to ask his sister often. "I shall certainly frame my creditors' list; it is the history of my whole life." And so in truth it was, for the debts were not finally liquidated until the year before his death, and then by wealthier means than his.

For years he had to go through greater anguish than even that in his first garret. "We pass," he says, "the second half of life in mowing down all that we have sown in our hearts during the first half—and this we call gaining experience!" But he had no time for regret;

he looked forward rather than back. He had put his name to his printing-press; he would place it now on his novels, and would justify his name there. So he took rooms in the *Rue de Tournon*. But his first struggles had taught him not to live in an attic. "There," says he, "they would give me nothing for my works," and the luxury he afterwards affected was primarily a method to obtain higher literary prices. He scarcely quitted his new novel, *Les Chouans*, till it was completed—never going even to Versailles, for he dreaded to meet his family. He was twenty-nine now; had failed in literature, failed in business, had forced his parents to sell their country house. His friends tormented him worse than his enemies. To them he seemed utterly incapable. They were for ever asking him when he was going to do some good work; and even, after his great works appeared they kept up the stereotyped inquiry. "I must die," he said bitterly, "before they know what I am worth."

He had only one believer in the world, and it is still to his sister that he pours out his troubles. Life would have been dreary indeed but for sympathy in some sort.

"Your letter gave me two detestable days and two detestable nights. They taunt me with the extravagance of my rooms, but all the furniture belonged to me before the catastrophe. No one single thing have I bought. . . . My books are my tools; I cannot sell them; the taste which makes everything here harmonize together cannot (unfortunately for the rich) be purchased. But still I cling so little to these things, that if any creditor wishes

to put me in Sainte Pélagie, I shall be delighted, for living would cost me nothing, and I could not be a closer prisoner there than I am here over my book. A portfolio for letters, an omnibus, are expenses I dare not now afford, and I never go about so as not to wear out my clothes. There, is it clear at last? Don't tease me any more to take walks and journeys and visits! They are impossible. And don't forget that I have nothing as fortune but time and labour; that I have not wherewithal to face the pettiest expenses. If you think too that I am always compelled to hold this pen, you will not have the courage to demand correspondence from me. To write when one's brain is weary and one's soul filled with torments! I should only worry you —and to what good? You don't seem to understand, that before setting to work I have seven or eight business letters to answer. I have still a fortnight more to spend over *Les Chouans,* till then, no Honoré; you might as well disturb the metal founder during the casting. Don't think anything bad of me, darling, if you give me that idea, I shall lose all heart. If my father had been ill, you would have told me, would you not? and, in that case, you know well enough that no human consideration would have kept me from him. I must live now without asking anything from any one. I must live for work, so as to acquit myself to all. When my *Chouans* is finished I will bring it you, but I wish to hear neither good things nor evil of it. The family and the friends of the man are incapable of judging the author."

"I have your scoldings under my eyes, madam. I

see you still want information about the poor delinquent. This Honoré, my dear sister, is a harum-scarum, riddled with debts, ready sometimes to knock his head against the wall—if, indeed, they allow him a head upon his shoulders at all. At this moment he is a prisoner in his chamber, busy with a duel to the death—having to slay half a ream of paper, and to pierce it through with an ink strong enough to put his purse into a state of joy and jollity. This *harum-scarum* has his good points; they call him cold and unthinking, but never believe that, dear sister. He has an excellent heart, and would still be ready to do good turns to everybody, if it were not that, no longer having credit with M. Shoemaker, he cannot run about as formerly."

The *Chouans*, by which Balzac first attracted the attention of the press, was an imitation of Scott's historical studies. He was, at that time, bent upon doing for France something of what the "Wizard of the North" had done for Scotland. Fortunately, after another attempt, he saw the futility of the undertaking.

By some lucky chance, Balzac went now to an actually honest publisher, one Levavasseur, with a grand idea. Publishers hold good ideas cheap, almost claim a monopoly of the best; but still this one was sufficiently struck by the plan of "A Lawyer's Note-book, written by an Old Head Clerk," to advance eight pounds upon the manuscript, which was to be deposited in a month. Many months he waited, and at last called upon Balzac, who had forgotten the whole matter, and who used, another publisher tells us, to look very small upon such

occasions; now, however, he waved his creditor mysteriously to a seat, and read aloud a portion of a work in hand. Suddenly the publisher cried, "I will give two thousand francs for that, monsieur; a thousand now on the nail, and a thousand more, minus the two hundred advanced, when the copy is completed." "Done!" cried Balzac joyfully; and so the book was bought and sold before it was written. Though commenced as early as 1824, it was still long before the plucky publisher was fairly free from dread of a second forgetfulness. He pestered Balzac with admonitions and enquiries, and sometimes Balzac replied. One of the shorter letters has been preserved:—

"My poor unfortunate publisher! I am working at it all night long. If I gossipped about, played billiards, drew up prospectuses; if I ate even, or drank, you might be right; but I have not an idea, I never take a step, in which the *Physiognomie* is not concerned. I dream of it, I do nothing else."

In spite of the publisher's uneasiness, the book appeared, and was tremendously successful, for its undoubted wit redeemed its undoubted pruriency. Cynical to brutality, plain spoken, almost to wantonness, for he certainly left nothing unsaid, this young anchorite of an author dived into the holiest mysteries, and professed to reform all social life. His success in this way is doubtful; his publisher's was certain. Neglected women—and how many are there in the "gallantest country in the world?"—hailed him as prophet and deliverer, though he had distinctly warned them off. The book, he declares, was

written not for women, but from women. Her he had nothing to teach. The first lines tell her that she may save herself all trouble of reading, because she knows the book already. "Men never say as much good or as much bad of women as they think themselves." This was forbidden fruit with a vengeance! and two editions were absorbed at once.

Balzac hit the iron when it was hot, producing in quick succession some half-dozen masterpieces. He had found his public now, but to this question of a new and untouched public, a female public, we must return hereafter. One volume after another, appealing to their ignored sympathies, fell from his pen. *Eugénie Grandet*, *Père Goriot*, *La Femme de Trente Ans*, *Le Peau de Chagrin*, *Séraphite*, and *Lys dans la Vallée*, without counting the *Contes drôlatiques*, which, written for the special purpose of restoring forgotten, picturesque, and archaic words, rivals Rabelais and Sterne in its extravagance, wit, and blunt humour.

These volumes brought him in more repute than money. He was too eager to sell them to stave off those luckless debts, but still, with thought of the future, he invariably retained a reversion of the copyrights; and for this reason the publisher made little either, and thus innumerable quarrels were engendered.

He soon broke with Lavavasseur, but only after he had been introduced by him to M. de Girardin, who, in 1829, enlisted him in the staff of the *Mode*, and here his first journalism commences. Balzac inspired Girardin with so much confidence, that they jointly started a

literary supplement, suitable for issue with all papers. After a few months this perished; but still the connection with the husband of "Delphine Gay" brought him into contact with all the leading literary men in Paris, and proved most beneficial to his future, and introduced him to the chief magazines and journals.

The press now declared itself against Balzac, but little did he care for the press. In 1830 he struck out a grand idea, and, as always, came running to his sister with it. "Kiss me, darling," he cried, "at last I am a genius!" The idea that thus excited him was that of uniting all the tales he had written and should write in one mighty work, as *Études des Mœurs*; this was the old attic dream, the ripening germ of the *Comédie humaine*. Laura was frightened at the magnitude of the undertaking, but Balzac cheered her—"Look, what it will be if I succeed!"

In 1830 one Werdet was appointed manager of the large publishing house belonging to the Widow Bechet. After constant persuasion he convinced her that Balzac was the young writer who would bring most success and wealth to the firm. He called on Balzac, and offered to buy, on her behalf, one or several of his books, and after a month's negociation, purchased the right to publish two thousand copies of the *Études des Mœurs au XIX*ème *Siècle*, in the twelve volumes, as they were then planned, for thirty-six thousand francs, This, of course, was the greatest bargain that Balzac had ever made.

In three years' time Werdet had saved some three

thousand francs, and determined to start for himself if he could only secure Balzac's aid. He called on Balzac with a mutual friend. The novelist listened coldly. "My works are dear at present. I have many wants. I shall require considerable advances." Werdet proudly drew out of his pocket the three thousand francs in notes. "There, monsieur, is my whole fortune! Write me a book! Make your own conditions!" Balzac roared with laughter; referred to the *Études*, brushed aside all obligation, as being on his part not on Werdet's, and then cried sternly:—"There gentlemen! for more than an hour you have been talking impossible things. You have made me lose two hundred and fifty francs already, for with me time is money. I must work, and you must leave me." "Hurrah!" said the friend as they got outside, humming "*Balzac te reviendra!*" "Let him come," cried Werdet, burning with mortification, "and I'll throw him through the doorway, through the window if need be!" "You won't!" said the friend. In three days Balzac wrote—he had been worried with a plot, did not know what Werdet had wished, would be at home at four, and so forth. Werdet replied curtly that he was over-busy to go out; and in three days more Balzac turned up, full of gratitude for Werdet's previous good services, very anxious for his future. And so for three thousand francs the *Médecin de Campagne* was purchased and a ten years' connection commenced.

The whole of the edition sold off in a week; in a fortnight a second edition had been absorbed. Werdet thought his fortune was made, and his friends thought so

too. He had no ready money, but printers, paper-dealers, and binders offered unlimited credit, if he could become Balzac's sole publisher. He proposed this, and Balzac clasped his hand. "Walter Scott," he cried, "had only one publisher, you shall be as much for me as Constable was for the author of *Quentin Durward*." "I hope," replied the other, "you will be more for me than Scott was to his publisher!" At present Balzac's first works were in six different hands and no small ingenuity was required to bring them all together. At last it was achieved, but the future works Balzac would only dispose of on a lease from year to year. This, probably, was the reason why almost all his publishers lost money by them, and why he himself made so little, for even after he had become the most famous novelist in Europe his earnings only averaged from ten to twelve thousand francs per annum; of course during this period every sou of this, unessential to mere existence, was handed over to his creditors. His sister saw that he was terribly overworking his strength, and tried to help him materially:—

"The journey you enable me to take will be my salvation, I have an absolute want of distraction and outer interest. I am fairly broken with the fatigue *Louis Lambert* caused me. I had set up so many nights, and had made such an abuse of coffee, that what I laughed at as trivial pains are turning into cramping tortures."

For the first time he leaves France for a month in Switzerland, journeying cheaply and yet sorely tempted. "I am at the gates of Italy, and I dread yielding to the

temptation of entering. Ah, travelling is so costly! I am coming homewards. What right had I to travel further?"

Until Balzac's works began to sell they were rather patronised by the French press. He became famous, and was then laden with the abuse that so readily attacks a satirist:—

> "Tu réformas et la ville et la cour,
> Mais quelle en fus la récompense?"

At first he cared little or nothing:—

"O simple one," he writes to his sister in those early days, "can the critics make my works good or bad? Leave me to time, dear, the great judge . . . besides, too, sometimes they do point out little faults, and thus I can improve the work."

"Again, thanks for your letter; pardon the poor artist the discouragement that rendered it necessary. I play so serious a game that I must ever progress. My books are the only answers I deign to make to those who are beginning to attack me! Don't let these critics worry you; they are good prognostics; people don't discuss mediocrity. Yes! you are right, my progress is real and my infernal courage will be rewarded. Convince my mother of this; bid her give me the alms of patience; and soon her devotion will be requited. One day I hope a little glory will pay for all! Poor mother! the imagination she herself gave me perpetually hurls me from north to south, from south to north—and fatiguing voyages they are. Tell her I love her as when I was a little

child. . . . . After reading your letter I shouted a joyous hurrah, and cried, 'to the front! to the front! hurl yourself into the battle!'"

In a year or two he changed his tone, saw nothing but personal hatred in this ferocious abuse; thought all means fair to counteract its effects. Sometimes even he assisted at his own glorification, and in the *Amateur d'Autographes* for May, 1865, a curious letter in his own handwriting, destined for some journal is preserved, relating to Werdet's new edition of the *Peau de Chagrin*. We can only give an extract:—

"The *Peau de Chagrin* has been judged as Anne Radcliffe's novels were judged. These things escape annotators and commentators. The eager reader surrounds himself with these books. They throw alike the millionaire's mansion and the poet's attic into a state of sleeplessness; they animate the country; in winter they lend a new sparkle to the faggots crackling on the hearth —glorious privilege of the novelist this! and, in brief, a novelist must be made by nature. If you do not come as a novelist into the world you will never obtain the popularity of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, of the *Arabian Nights*, of the *Peau de Chagrin*—in short of M. Balzac. What a teller of stories he is! What *verve!* What wit! What indefatigable perseverance in painting all things, daring all, branding all! How that man dissects the world! What an anatomist! What passion! What cold-bloodedness! . . . . The *Peau de Chagrin* is *Candide* with notes by Béranger. It is the misery, the luxury, the faith, the mockery! it is the heartless heart, the brain-

less head of this nineteenth century—of a century so tricked out, so perfumed, so revolutionary, so little lettered, so little anything—a century of brilliant phantasmagorias, of which in fifty years we shall seize nothing, except this *Peau de Chagrin* of M. Balzac."

There is a superb assurance in this passage. It is difficult to sympathize with a man who thus puffs himself off as if he were some quack nostrum; but what would have become of Balzac if he had never had a lively and all-powerful faith in his own genius. Everybody round esteemed him as a fool; would have made him a notary's clerk, a copyist, a printer. He knew this while he knew what great things were in him; and, when he did succeed, he felt no necessity of simulating a modest ignorance. He was vain and sometimes overbearing, as all the strong-willed men have been whose will has been impotent through so many years of gibing. Look at Johnson, and in another way at Goethe! If all men have their weakness, is it really a weakness to know your greatness in comparison to the pigmies round? It is bad taste, certainly, to proclaim it as blatantly as Balzac did. "We men of letters," began a young, unknown author at a literary dinner one day. "You a man of letters!" shouted Balzac rising. "You compare yourself with us! you forget, monsieur, that you have the honour of sitting with the marshals of modern literature!" He had, too, a statuette of Napoleon I. in his chamber, under this he inscribed:—"What he has not finished by the sword I will accomplish by the pen! Honoré de Balzac." And this exclusive pride, more than

anything else, raised troops of enemies among writers whose vanity was as great as their success was paltry.

As time wore on he tried to take more extended measures against journalism—that is, as far as regarded himself, against criticism—because he acknowledged its influences; and calling together his friends, he proposed a league defensive, and even offensive, against it. He said:—

"I do not like journalism; I may even say I hate it; it is a blind power, deaf, malignant, callous; without morality, tradition, or aim. It is as the butcher slaying every night, so as to live on the morrow on the proceeds of the slaughter. But it is a power—nay it is *the* power of the age." Then he pointed out how he wanted the whole clique to exercise this power for the common good of all, so as to gain their own ends, praise their own works, ensure their own speedy fortunes, and conquer and overcome their enemies. The band was called the "Red Horse," from the tavern where they met to settle their affairs, and the Empire's. The club soon broke down, for all their grand schemes resulted in a few dinners and many criticisms written for Balzac, upon Balzac, in praise of Balzac; while the president never penned any one word in favour of his brethren of the "Red Horse."

After this he joined the *Société des Gens de Lettres*, endeavouring to protect his interests from European piracy, and drew up an admirable literary code, in which the rights of authors were most skilfully shielded and fostered—and which, when authors come to have any

rights, may perhaps serve as model. But he broke away from the *Société* because they presumed to put this code into committee, instead of forwarding it straightway to the Government.

As we said before, next to glory, the great dream of Balzac's life was wealth—"the epitome of the nineteenth century, the motive force of modern life," as he termed it. Indeed his enemies maintained that fame and fortune were his only Muses, and his career shows that he thought of little else; his life was simply work, with a view to the one aim or the other, and to them his whole happiness was sacrificed. We see this intense longing for wealth in his works; "metallic heroes" govern half his novels. They hoard millions to bequeath, or inherit them to scatter broadcast. Sometimes we have the contrast of penury grovelling behind untold treasures. At others, the more startling contrast of a penniless and worthless man of the world, living in the gorgeous luxury that in fiction a Rothschild or an Oppenheim alone could affect. And if we have no wealth, our sympathy is awakened by the want of it. We see this same craving, too, in every item of his daily life. In his idle moments he is busy with some new-born scheme of sudden fortune. Even when the difficulties of his labour, the severe fatigues of midnight vigils, the bitter disputes with publishers, knavish or weak, the legal actions against magazine proprietors, the horror of his increasing debts, sent him broken and disconsolate to his sister's drawing-room, he would try for awhile to correct the proofs he brought, and then laying his head on his

arms he would declare that all cunning had gone from him, and all hope; and so wait, limp and wretched, for five minutes till his eyes would sparkle and his cheeks glow again with the cheering prospect of another scheme.

"After all Chance is there," he would say, "and I can't see why it should not aid me as well as the fools. Let only one of my millionaire friends (and I have them) come to me, or some banker, not knowing how to dispose of his spare cash, and say: 'I know your immense talent, poor fellow, and your troubles, and that such a sum would set you free; you will recoup me soon; your pen is good for millions!' There, sister mine, I want nothing but that!" Then, warming to his subject, he would prove that this was not only possible but likely—extremely likely. "What! wouldn't it be something for a man—I care not whether banker or millionaire—to say, 'I have saved a Balzac!' Once free, I go straight to the Institute; from there to the Chamber of Peers; then I become a minister. Nothing extraordinary in that, eh? Why, it's the hackneyed course of things—and at the end I heap rewards upon him who aided me." Cheered, and full of hope, he would set to again and finish his hack-work.

At other moments of wretchedness he was of different opinion; he would be sole architect of his own fortunes, and by some sudden grand discovery, for modern wealth must have never a thought of drudgery about it, but should be as spontaneous as beauty. So he discovered a new material for paper, found everywhere, costing nothing. He raved of this for weeks, till rushing ex-

citedly to his sister's house one day they asked him, "Well, how about the new paper?" "Confound the new paper, listen to this!" he cried; "Eureka! I am a millionaire if I can only borrow five hundred francs!" And then he showed how the Romans had worked silver mines in Sardinia, and how imperfectly, and how the richly laden scoriæ must still be there. The trifling advance was forthcoming. He reached Sardinia, after breaking down half-way, and staking his paltry remaining cash at enormous odds, and winning, he came home laden with the scoriæ. The chemists pronounced it still full of silver. This time he was successful, so he could wait, and for the next year faithfully carry out his literary engagements. Still he purchased a house upon the strength of the speculation, and returned to Sardinia as soon as possible. He had been too free-spoken; the captain of the vessel in which he had previously returned had already received the concession.

To a brain like Balzac's this was delay not defeat. He "discovered perpetual motion" next, till his friends showed him that, even by his own diagrams, a two-horse power was essential to the machine. Then he found an admirable method of breaking the bank at Homburg—but he altogether forgot the double zero.

Still there were mysterious means; from boyhood he had believed in Mesmer's doctrine—indeed he carried the study on through life, as some of his novels amply testify. He cultivated an eminent somnambulist and so discovered a buried treasure. Nothing was easier than to convince Gautier and three other friends of its actual existence.

They all spent what little money they had in picks and shovels and sacks, and then—no one would lend them wherewithal to pay the railway fare.

At other times these friends were less confiding. At two o'clock one morning, he aroused a great friend, Laurent Jan, after escaping the imprecations of the *concierge*. "Rise, man, quick," cried Balzac, "we must start on our journey." "Start where? when?" asked Jan, yawning. "There is no time for explanation! I will tell you as we go." "You don't get me up," said Jan, "till you have told me all about it." "O man, rejoice!" answered Balzac, "we are setting out at once to visit the Great Mogul!" "Are you cracked?" asked Jan. "We are going to be immensely rich, rich as an empire, rich as the Mogul's empire—make haste man, you have lost a million already by dawdling in bed. Time is flying, and we have still to find Gozlan, for of course he must share the treasure." "O! if Gozlan is going. . . ." and Jan got up and dressed, "I am awake now! why should you go to the Mogul?" "Because," whispered Balzac, "I have a ring. Look at it! what is it worth?" "Four sous perhaps—well, perhaps, six." "Fool! this ring was given me by the great historian, Von Hammer, at Vienna; he said, 'some day you will know its importance.' I saw the characters on it, and waited. I have been to-night to the Turkish ambassador's. He said, 'you have the Prophet's ring there, with the Prophet's name inscribed on it. It was stolen a hundred years ago, and the Great Mogul has offered tons of gold and diamonds to him who will restore it.' Look at what is waiting us. Come, man,

quick! What? don't you think the tons of gold enough?" "Confound you," said Jan, "and in my first sleep, too. I'll give you, as I said, four sous for your grand ring." Balzac, furious but helpless, deigned to sleep on the hearthrug, and in the morning the ring was hidden away for ever.

"The old proverb," says an American, "of having too many irons in the fire, is a beastly old lie; shove all in—shovel, tongs, and poker;" and Balzac agreed with the American. He had a saner scheme at last. He bought an estate, as we shall see by-and-by, on which to grow pineapples, worth a louis each; but he meant to cut out the gardeners by retailing them at five francs apiece, and so realize half a million francs a year.

We can only indicate a few of the schemes fathered on him; but, as a literary man, of course journalism—the costliest hobby of all—was not forgotten. He bought the *Chronique de Paris*, and started the *Revue Parisienne*, on money borrowed from a confiding friend of his mother's. He rallied a famous literary clique around him; he supplied champagne and banquets freely; in the case of one of his contributors, at all events, he paid off a debt of three thousand francs; and the journals were as brilliant as pyrotechnics, and nearly as shortlived.

The faith Balzac had in his own plans almost mesmerically influenced his hearers; under his eloquent sophistry the maddest schemes were feasible, and it took time and absence to shake off the spell. One night he so developed a new speculation of growing opium in Corsica, and then becoming enormously wealthy, that

Dutacq rushed fairly out of the room, crying, "If I stop he will make me as mad as himself." "He made me dizzy," said another of his guests; "he is not a man, but an ocean!" Still he deceived himself oftener than others. We have a capital case in point. His neighbour, Latouche, had aided him so frequently with advice, that Balzac, determining to be generous, came to him: "My dear friend, you must do me the favour of accepting something. I insist upon it! You must have my Arab horse." "An Arab horse! Impossible! I have no stable, and then look what it would cost you!" "I really don't want the beast myself, and, Latouche, we shall quarrel if you refuse; I will never speak to you again!" Conquered at last, Latouche yielded, and went home grateful and perplexed. Of course, no Arab horse was ever forthcoming. Some of his friends were not quite so confiding. Henry Monnier listened patiently for a whole evening to a scheme that was to immediately bring in fourteen million francs, and then looking quietly up: "I say, Balzac, advance me a hundred sous on the whole thing;" and Balzac joined in the laugh.

Twice Balzac was rejected by the Academy, and, as he always professed to believe, on account of his poverty. "They reject my honourable poverty, do they? Well, at all events, they shall never have my wealth," he growled; though this double defeat hurt him more than any other of his failures.

Disappointment after disappointment came, but he was quickly cheered. The smallest success, the scantiest praise, raised him to a seventh heaven. Three several

German families visited him one day, and told him that his fame only commenced at the boundaries of the French Empire. "Persevere in your labours, monsieur," they added, "and you will soon be at the head of literary Europe." "Of Europe!" my sister, "of Europe!" he cried, repeating the story in the evening.

And, in truth, his fame was becoming European—his works were reproduced or pirated at Brussels, at St. Petersburg, at Rome, bringing in, however, more repute than fortune; but still everything ahead now looked clearer:—

"If," he writes in 1835, "if no misfortune happens, I shall in 1836 owe nothing save to my mother; and when I think of my disasters, and the sad years I have passed, I cannot hinder myself feeling proud that it will be by courage and toil only that I shall have conquered my liberty." But he was too eager; he was not free from his troubles for many years to come, in spite of all his marvellous successes.

This success, in the first instance, came from women. He had learned them, studied them, read them—Heaven knows how; intuitively say his friends—till he knew every detail of their lives, as never writer before or since. He was as familiar with all their phases, sensible and sensual, as any old confessor or physician. He paints them ever as victims to modern social life—even as victims to their own nervous systems. He shows them as altogether unappreciated, dragging out their lives in continual self-sacrifice, half stifling their hopes for sympathy in petty country villages, and dull suburban

streets, "sinking in a vague disease," as they long and watch and wait for some impossible ideal, some unfathomable future; for the present has nothing but *ennui* and idleness; it is without hope as it is without work or ambition; at best, they can only hoard money, they can never hope to make it. His married women have a chance of solace, by despairingly "throwing themselves into maternity." Thus, analyzing the weakness of women, he shows that they could never be strong, and ever combats the selfish theory that, with her chastity, a woman puts off all her virtues.

He had, as Gautier tells us, no feeling for the beautiful simply as the beautiful. He wanted character and expression; above all, he wanted modern life, not sculptured loveliness and the coldness and correctness of marble. In the Gallery of Antiques he would turn wearedly aside from the Venus of Milo to watch any Parisian grand lady, or poor grisette, who chanced to be standing by; and it was thus he painted women, with living virtues, living vices, tricked out in their newest robes and shawls and fantasies, with every individual and minutest detail of the sufferings, the wounds, the passions of modern life.

More than this, his works "are a gallantry in ninety volumes," for he lengthened the age of love. In his *La Femme de Trente Ans, La Femme abandonnée, La Femme malheureuse*, and others, he adds decades to the reputed limit of womanly beauty, and womanly power—tries to prove that the summer of life is the most beautiful; that in our colder climates the roses bloom in June, not in

April, as the eastern poets have sung; and succeeds, at all events, in giving a strange sympathy to a time of life when sympathy is most needed. What a public was thus opened out to him! Novels are almost entirely consumed by women: far more ravenously by women of thirty than by girls of twenty; for these latter every-day life has charm enough—they need not go far abroad to look out for romances. From their gratitude, then, in France, and wherever French was read, the women of from twenty-eight to five-and-thirty became his disciples and defenders.

After a close study of Balzac's works, we are compelled to own the general truth of his pictures of women, the feminine purity of a few of his types; still, acknowledging this, we feel there is a note wrong somewhere. His love, even when he tries to paint it as holiest, is too materialistic, and material passion is the one avowed object of all his heroines. As Mr. Leslie Stephen wittily puts it, "If they do not break the seventh commandment they are always thinking about not breaking it." Perhaps Balzac is right after all; they are French women, not English, that he paints.

One result of the sympathy given and elicited, was an overwhelming feminine correspondence—enough to have turned the head of any but an anchorite like Balzac. He was chosen by all the uncomprehended women in France—and in the "gallantest country" there are naturally most—as confidant and confessor and consoler. We have wonderful stories of these letters and their writers, but have no time to track them down. One

of the letters, however, constitutes a turning-point in Balzac's life.

The last publication to which we referred was the *Médecin de Campagne*, published in 1835. Shortly afterwards he received a note and a book. The letter, full of humble admiration and acknowledgement for solace and comfort, regretted that as a stranger generally living in Russia, the writer could scarcely hope to know him personally, and was signed by the Countess de Hanska, a Polish lady. The volume was the book of all others most typical of consolation—à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ.* Balzac was strangely stirred. There was a simplicity in the letter and the gift that he had never found elsewhere. Thoughts of the writer haunted him till he could not help searching for her, and so he took the train to Neufchatel, where for the moment she was staying. She proved to be a handsome woman of thirty, intelligent, sympathetic, witty, wealthy—with a little daughter and a husband. From the first a firm friendship was established, and his passion was compressed into a *respectueuse affection.* To her he dedicated his next volume, and dedicated his life. For seventeen years she filled his thoughts. They wrote to each other often, and sometimes met. For, full of longing for her presence, he used to throw up the most important engagements for a week or two, and rush impetuously off to Russia. To all his friends but one these impulsive absences were a mystery. To his sole confidant he would sometimes give a word of explanation on his return—" Ah, I only saw her for a moment, but what a happiness to see her at all ! "

For seventeen years she governed all his thoughts; she was his first love and his last love—and then she complemented his "two sole desires—to be famous, to be loved."

She was very rich and Balzac very poor. Wealth had been one of his dreams before; for a short time it became all paramount, for now it was a means, not an end. After his return from Vienna, in 1835, whither he had been on a hasty visit to the Countess Hanska, his brain seemed to have been fairly turned with the luxury in which she lived. For a moment his old creed was forgotten—"an artist," he now declared, "should lead a splendid life."

To carry out these costly notions he hired a set of chambers at Chaillet, reserving his old rooms for seclusion and study. He had always had something of a monomania for works of art—he wanted the surroundings of splendid books, carved furniture, curious pictures, and extravagant bric-à-brac. He bought them when it seemed possible, and when utterly impossible imagined them altogether. On books, his "tools" as he termed them, he had from boyhood always lavished whatever his debts had spared, and his private library was one of the finest in Paris, and this not from merely personal motives, for he meant to bequeath it to his birthplace, but at Tours his townsfolks, expressing a sorry opinion of his talent, declined to buy his works, and, profoundly wounded, Balzac changed his mind in a rage.

Reserved and self-contained as he had been, he now wished to become a man of fashion, and to take some

part in the reputation of his writings. He went into society, and the first drawing-rooms were thrown open to him. His platonic friendship with Madame de Girardin became the town's talk; her presence was an inspiration, but his feelings were innocent enough. All the evening through he used to sit silently dreaming of something—of her perhaps, perhaps of the other woman—and there their friendship was bounded. For society's sake he gave up his irksome labours, and bought instead the *Chronique de Paris*, for he meant to be as easily wealthy as the other proprietors of great journals. He fitted up his new rooms with all that credit could obtain, or taste desire, realizing to every detail the famous boudoir described in his *Fille aux Yeux d'Or;* still he had only to touch the spring of a secret door in this chamber to escape into a little bare compartment, with nothing in it but a narrow camp-bedstead and a deal desk, and here his private life was passed, and the little work he now did was written.

He started a cane, too, a marvellous cane, big as a band-master's *bâton*. The huge handle was said to consist entirely of the gems and trinkets forwarded by his female admirers, for he was pestered with presents and letters, of which latter, says one biographer in all gravity, he received eleven thousand! The nature, if not the number of the presents, was sometimes equally startling—one lady sending him the whole of her beautiful hair, as from—in English too—*an unknown friend*. But the sympathy of which he was proudest was that of an English waitress at some petty *café*, who, hearing his

name pronounced by a friend, refused to allow him to pay for his dinner.

We must return, however, to the cane, for it was only the starting-point of his extravagances. It was impossible to walk about with it, so he hired a fine *coupé* at five hundred francs a month, and started a coachman and an English tiger in sumptuous liveries. For its sake still, he even took a box at each opera-house, and whenever he dropped in he used to lay this cane conspicuously upon the cushion, till the audience whispered to each other, "O! there is Balzac! Balzac with his cane!" for now he was one of the lions of the boulevards. All Paris knew his cane, and its mystic legends; many even pretended to believe that it was a magic walking-stick, through which he gained the power of gazing into the hearts and souls of men. Even Madame de Girardin, wrote a popular novel upon "La Canne de M. de Balzac."

This life went on for months; he half ruined his publishers by neglecting all contracts; he scarcely wrote, even in his own *Chronique de Paris*, which was he imagined supplying him with unlimited funds. Disaster followed disaster. Once he was actually imprisoned for debt, and made Paris ring again with the magnificence of his entertainments while in durance. A second time he only escaped by the generosity of a lady, with whom he was dining at the time, for she rebuked the bailiff's impertinent appearance by throwing the money in his face. The newspaper only lasted fifteen months, and involved him to the extent of fifty thousand francs—and this at a moment, when, as he had written

to his sister, he had hoped to owe nothing save to his mother.

The crisis came, and it is in the emergencies of his career that Balzac stands out in boldest, clearest relief; dauntless, as of old, he looked the circumstances coolly in the face, and set to work again—and he could work when he chose. If an important task was in hand he laboured sixteen or eighteen hours a day, never, in any case, sleeping more than six. When busy he went to bed at six, and rose at midnight, keeping his senses aroused, and his brain inspired, by black coffee. All original composition was executed before nine, when he breakfasted, and then he began to study, revise, and correct. "The life of a galley-slave," says Gozlan; "in its murderous effects atrocious and against nature; but without such efforts I verily believe it to be impossible for the pen to dig a deep furrow in the side of the hard mountain of fame—and speedily at the foot of that same mountain the writer finds his resting-place."

For toils like these society had, of course, to be abandoned, and society, in revenge, hawked about scandalous anecdotes of Balzac's sudden disappearance, but, as George Sand writes, he concealed his life only to have full possession of his hours and all the charms of his laborious nights—in a word his whole being was sacrificed to the *Comédie humaine*, for visits to *Carissima* were still of distant intervals.

It is difficult, through the gossipping annals of his life and works, to keep the bodily Balzac steadfastly in view. He was only forty now, but vastly altered,

since a slim, rosy-cheeked lad in his attic he had first "fought misery with the pen." But he was instinct still with life and vigour and will. Broad-shouldered and massive, though but five feet high—for, as he laughed himself, "all our greatest men are little"—he was half Hercules, half satyr. A superb head covered with long black hair, prematurely flaked with silver, but still curly and glossy; Like Samson he believed it was his strength, and however untidy he otherwise might be, this hair was always artistically arranged; his forehead, broad and powerful, with a deep thought-wrinkle between the eyes, which, already hollow, were bright and quick as ever, with odd sparkles of grey light in their black-brown depths, looking not at you but into you. His mouth was saturnine and firm-set, till he laughed—a long, loud laugh, famous as Landor's. An olive complexion, glowing on the cheeks into a fierce blending of red and yellow; his voice in its penetrating sweetness like any true orator's, but, like most of our saddest satirists, he always spoke joyously and was ever the soul of his company. In short, a suppressed power and passion, an intense individuality, were the things that first struck strangers.

At home he wore a large cashmere dressing-gown, with shirt unbuttoned, and his burly white neck quite free; on his head the same manner of night-cap that he had adopted years ago. When abroad he was either scrupulously well dressed, or very neglected, as he went on business or pleasure; but in any case the passers-by would turn to look at him as we only turn after men full of power, or after beautiful women.

Perhaps no one, as Gozlan says, ever lived so much in the night as Balzac. If he had no pressing work on hand, he would, like Dickens and Goldsmith and poor Chatterton, start forth at night to dream over plots, or to watch as of old the humours of the poorer folk. Sometimes he would be in a dream before he started, and often he used to be surprised by finding himself deep in the country, clad in dressing-gown and night-cap, having many miles to drive back on the sole credit of his name, which was good money in every cabman's eyes.

His method of work was immensely laborious. "If I write four words, I blot three," said Boileau—Balzac would have blotted four. Before writing a single line he formed in his mind the subject, the plot, the episodes, the surroundings; he followed out every detail as to the place the scene was laid in; foresaw the pettiest characteristics in the physiognomy of his subjects, and in their habits and costumes. Then he began to put pen to paper, tossing every leaf over his shoulder, without numbering, so as to save him from the temptation of re-reading. But this first draft, scored and transposed and blotted as it was, would amount to only, perhaps, forty pages. This was sent to the printer, and the proof was returned with huge margins. Then he began again from the commencement—a word became a line, a line a page, a page a chapter—every available space and corner was exhausted, and by the time it was again sent to the printer there would be matter enough for a hundred pages, but the directing lines and cross-lines and scribblings, had given the whole things the appearance of

an enormous spider's web. Eight or ten revises would be treated in a similar manner before the novel attained its complete proportions.

From this mania for correction, generally costing forty francs a sheet, arose most of Balzac's quarrels with publishers and editors. But he was inflexible upon the point, for he was unable to see his matter properly until in type, and he preferred to sacrifice remuneration rather than risk unsatisfactory work. To M. Buloz he willingly abandoned fifty francs a sheet out of the two hundred and fifty allowed, afterwards bringing a lawsuit and quarrelling with him utterly because he had sent unrevised proof sheets to some St. Petersburg journal. Even the journeymen printers rose in arms against the intricacies of M. Balzac's "copy," and "not more than two hours a day of M. Balzac" was the rule in all the large printing establishments of Paris.

Like Defoe and Edgar Allan Poe, Balzac endeavoured to ensnare the reader's faith by the most careful attention to detail, and by his intense realism. If he laid the scene of a novel in any little country town, he went thither, and returned laden with notes and sketches till the inhabitants believed that one of their number had betrayed them. He frequented the lowest resorts—rat-hunts, dog-fights, and viler amusements still—in search of new scenes and fresh sensations. He wormed himself into the friendship of any one who could throw light upon strange phases of human life—Vidocq, head of the police, and even the wretch who dropped the guillotine. This was no mere trade-trick, for he thoroughly believed

in realism. When David sculptured his bust he exclaimed, "Above all study my nose, M. David; there is a whole world in that!"

In nothing was Balzac more fastidious than in the choice of his titles and in the names of his characters. One drizzling autumn afternoon, Gozlan met him in the Champs Elysées. "I am looking for a name," said Balzac; "my book is already written, but I cannot christen the hero." "We'll put our heads together," replied Gozlan, "and soon make one up." "Not we! I've tried every possible vocal combination, and all to no purpose! A name must adhere to its owner like the gum to the tooth, the hair to the roots, the nail to the flesh. You can't make a name any more than you can make granite or flint, or coal, or marble. It is as easy to create a language as a name." "Then we must find the name ready-made," suggested Gozlan, "if such a name really does exist." "Of course we must find it, and of course it exists by this time." And so they wandered over half Paris, scanning the tradesmen's signboards, till Gozlan, tired to death, revolted. "Always the same story!" said Balzac sadly; "Columbus deserted by his crew. Leave me! No, lean on my arm. You can't be tired, but I will support you a little further." It was useless to rebel. At last, with a voice broken with emotion, Balzac cried, "There, there, there! read, read, read!" and Gozlan saw a wretched little house with *Marcas* inscribed above the doorway. "O! what a meaning in Marcas. I will call him *Z. Marcas* to better point his crooked and untoward fate. That man is a philosopher, writer, poet, great

politician, altogether unappreciated. All are expressed in *Marcas!*" "I will see," said Gozlan; "No! tailor!" he cried, running back across the street. "He deserved a better fate!" said Balzac slowly, "but still no matter. Be it my business to render him immortal!"

Between 1827 and 1847 Balzac published no less than ninety-seven distinct works, occupying some thirty thousand pages of the ordinary French novel. Besides this, there are the forty early volumes, his three plays, and literary contributions innumerable. Consider the study and labour of every slightest detail, the corrections to which each new edition was rigorously and incessantly submitted, and you gather something of the indefatigable labours of the man. And still this hard, ungrateful life was now broken only by rare journeys to the ends of Europe to see the Countess Hanska for a few days or moments.

Balzac's luxurious rooms at Chaillet had been parted with at a dead loss of twelve thousand francs, and, in 1838, he determined to economize still further and at the same time realize his ambition of becoming a landed proprietor. Once before, when full of the Sardinian silver mines, he had purchased a little house, but circumstances had speedily compelled him to sell it. Now he looked around for a small estate, which he could farm to the tune of many thousands per cent. per annum, and on which he might erect himself a dwelling, so as to reduce expenditure as low as might be. At last he pitched upon a site—historical as he was pleased to think—in Ville d'Afray. This he christened the Jardies, and it

cost him as much as his bargains always did. The estate stood up bluffly, bleak and bare, like nothing so much as the Peak of Teneriffe. No plants had taken root there but one acrobatic walnut tree, hereafter to be famous; but he laughed at former owners and vowed that the garden should amply pay for the house, which in the style of an Italian villa he built himself, partly still for the sake of economy, partly because he could trust no living architect to carry out his wishes. He succeeded in making all the rooms square and rectangular; but he forgot the staircase, or rather avoided it, every time the masons warned him. At last the house was finished, the ladders ready for removal, when desperately they again urged the point upon him. "Ho, oh!" he cried in a rage, "since this staircase is going to make a fool of us, let's turn him out of doors!" And it was built out of doors accordingly.

This trouble was easily, if uncomfortably surmounted. Others presented more difficulty. The house and garden stood on an abrupt incline, upon a soil of small stones and broken bricks. Nothing would live there—nay, nothing would stand. There was one wall, famous to all his friends as the walls of Ilium, or the great wall of China. Balzac hated this wall, and his neighbours hated it, for it was always falling on one side or the other. He was perpetually aroused from his slumbers,—"Monsieur, your wall has gone next door!" "What, again?" "Yes, the whole of it." "And now my duns will come in a body!" Fresh architects were called in to decide the the angle of resistance. "The angle is

right enough," said they, after many expensive experiments, "try brick and cement as foundations." At last, like Balbus, he was able to look around complacently, and say—"Costly, but what of that? This time it will live and die in its bed!"

But, during the probationary period, this wall made Balzac horribly jealous. There was one neighbour he kept as a pet enemy, for the man "had done him greater injury than ever he would dare to put forth!" At all events this enemy had a wall that did stand, though only built of rough stones, piled loosely one upon another. In the dead of night, Balzac used to arm his friends with crow-bars, and bid them entirely uproot the hated boundary. Still they were never caught, though a legal action was commenced and dropped.

Inside the Jardies everything was perfect. The stout garden door shut out all untimely creditors; the huge green blinds, always tightly drawn, forbade any hopes of overlooking the movements of the household. There was a secret system of bells, noiseless altogether to the guests, and admirably fulfilling their purpose downstairs, save that there was never anybody to answer them. And then the furniture was most thoroughly ideal, for as yet it was not, since Balzac had spent on the house itself far more than he could well afford. Yet, anticipating the future, he wrote on the stone walls and elsewhere, in huge charcoal letters:—"here an ornament in Parian marble; here a cedar-wood pedestal; here a ceiling, painted by Delacroix; here Aubusson tapestry; here a sculptured marble mantelpiece;" and "here," scrawled Gozlan one

day, "here a picture by Raphael, beyond all price, and such as has never been seen." And this was allowed to stand with the others.

Still the Jardies was a favourite haunt with the few friends, mostly famous men now, whom he admitted to familiar intercourse. They came and went when they liked, seeing their host only after dinner, whenever he was not too busy, and then he was superb. A Pantagruel, but a vegetarian Pantagruel, using his fruit-knife like a sword, and with his boisterous mirth driving all cares away from others. Though the bottle was more than freely passed, he drank no wine himself, but after dessert was finished, he treated his guests to his own coffee and tea. His coffee was as famous in Paris as Voltaire's had been; he prepared it with his own hands, and in delicate fragrance it was only second to his tea, but this was reserved only for the few elect. This tea, he said, was grown only for the Emperor of China; mandarins of highest rank watered it daily, and it was gathered at full moon by young virgins with religious rites. Sometimes the Czar of Russia received a few handfuls as a present, and through the Russian Ambassador, by some mystical means, it came into Balzac's possession.

After this short interval he retired to rest, and then to work again.

Housebuilding and hospitality did certainly not further the liquidation of his debts. Debt and all its misery is an inevitable buffer between genius, and fame the fulfilment of genius. Now he was famous, and the sting of these debts was deadened. Nay, at one time they bade

fair to outrival the reputation of his works. He wanted, as we know, to struggle hand and foot with Dumas, Lamartine, Hugo, and the other literary Rothschilds of the period, and, as his earnings scarcely averaged more than from ten to twelve thousand francs yearly, he became a millionaire of debt. If he could not, like the others, have horses and carriages, and wonderful houses and wicked little snuggeries, he could, at all events, hint at huge sums always due, and ever draining his exchequer. But these debts were somewhat sceptically treated by his friends. "You must have a million or two put safely away, Balzac!" they used to tease him; and Balzac would grimly point to the sturdy garden door, where the big bell clanged from morning to night. When this bell rang no one certainly thought of opening the door; but still, with finger on lip, he begged his guests to stand noiselessly for a while, and then encouraged the mastiff to bark ominously, and so soon as the retreating footsteps were heard, he would gratefully clasp his hands, and expect as many congratulations as if he had been saved from an earthquake. Next to the *Contes drôlatiques* on his bookshelves, stood a thick little volume, bound in black—The *Comptes mélancholiques*—a list of bills and creditors.

With aid of the Jardies Balzac thought he could soon cancel this debt for ever. Here he would plant vines, and five hundred feet of pineapples, to be sold at five francs each, instead of a louis. He would start a shop on the Boulevards, for the exclusive sale of these "Pineapples from the Jardies," and put his name above the

door, "Balzac, Greengrocer;" and there would be much scandal and all Paris would flock to buy, till he could certainly sell one hundred thousand of them annually, which would mean half a million francs; and then look how cheap they would be and how good! Still business not philanthropy was his aim, and there were other resources in this enchanted garden.

When Hugo one day called, Balzac led him triumphantly over the estate, but Hugo's praises were reserved till he exclaimed,—"At last, here is a tree!" "Yes," cried Balzac, "and a precious tree too. Do you know what it yields?" "Walnuts, probably, as it is a walnut tree." "Wrong! it yields fifteen thousand livres a year." "Of walnuts?" "No, of honest francs." "A magical tree; well! it doesn't look like it." However Balzac explained that by an ancient custom all the neighbours were compelled to deposit their refuse at the foot of this tree. Hugo recoiled. "Oh, reassure yourself, its functions are momentarily suspended. But think of the quantity and richness of the manure! I shall keep a mountain of it ready to sell to all farmers, vine-dressers, market gardeners, and land proprietors, great and small. It is a bank of gold! it is an island of guano. . . ." "Yes," laughed Hugo, "guano minus the birds," and then he went indoors to dazzle Balzac with the fabulous sums which his dramas were then bringing in.

From his first boyish attempt of *Cromwell,* Balzac had had a strong craving for the stage. It was not enough to be read in all the most polished drawing-rooms in Europe, to be translated into half the languages of

civilization, to have won everywhere the sympathy of eyes and hearts; but he wanted an immediate and visible applause—and he wanted, too, the great money reward that successful dramas offered. After Hugo's visit this desire became for a while a perfect mania. He talked and thought of nothing else. One night he cried exultingly, "Ha! ha! I have hold of a glorious idea for the Porte-Saint-Martin, and the manager I know is with me! Five hundred representations, one with another, at five thousand francs, equals seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. Now calculate, at twelve per cent. for the author, that is eighty thousand francs for us. I won't speak of our tickets, on which Porchet will advance five or six thousand francs in good gold; nor of our account of some ten thousand copies of the printed play at three francs a copy, but still it is worth something, this sixty thousand francs—nor of the . . ." But here he was interrupted by shouts of laughter, to tell him that even his figures were ludicrously incorrect, and in the laughter the "great idea" slipped through his fingers before he could clutch it.

While in this rage for the theatre, Balzac summoned to his aid all manner of curious *collaborateurs*—the strangest being a weakly young poetaster named Laissaily. No one could ever guess why he, above all others, was selected. But Balzac was in earnest, brought him to the Jardies to live, fed him up, made him sleeker and rosier than any young poet of the time; but there were duties! Balzac worked only in the night, and in the night Laissaily wanted to sleep. At two or three

in the morning Balzac would ring his bell, and the poor wretch had to creep up in his drawers and night-shirt. "Let me see what you have found, Laissaily!" and Laissaily with eyes full of sleep would murmur, "Yes! I must find something! I must invent something!" "Well, be quick, then, and invent something! Harol wrote to me this evening; I saw Le Maitre yesterday. They are hungering and thirsting for a play that will draw all Paris. Now where is the play that will draw all Paris? Have you got the plot even? Not quite? Then you have part of it?" "Yes, monsieur, and no, monsieur!" "Well, I am listening." "I like your first suggestion best! you invent and then I help. We bring our ideas together, and I'm sure . . ." "Why you are asleep, man; go to bed for an hour, Laissaily, and in an hour the Muse will visit you!" And so for an hour the unhappy creature retired to rack his brains for a play that would draw all Paris, till again he heard the fatal bell and found Balzac as wakeful and eager as ever. Thus by degrees all the good of the visit wore off. The poet grew thin, pale, seriously ill, till at last he fled altogether, and was met by one of Balzac's friends on the lowest of the Boulevards. "What, you here! you have quitted the Jardies?" "Indeed I have! He fed me well—roast meat every day, vegetables twice, dessert to profusion, and what coffee! But who could stand it? To rise six, aye, and eight times a night, and that not all, but to have for ever a pistol to one's head to invent a drama that should draw all Paris. No! I have had my miseries, and welcome to them! But as long as I live I will never set

foot in that confounded Jardies again!" He never afterwards pronounced Balzac's name without trembling —and he died an early death.

Balzac's dramas, unlike his novels, were written in feverish and impatient haste; never more than once, not always even that once. At last he hit upon the plot of *Vautrin*, and late one night summoned four of his friends:—"I want to read my play at the theatre to-morrow. Are you willing?" "Certainly," cried they, "read it to us now!" "How can I? I have not written a word. I shall lose thousands if I am late. Help me, all! Each of you write an act, and I the fifth. . . No, no, no! how can I tell you the subject now, we shall never have time to finish!" However, they snatched an inkling of the plot, and bravely set to work—the play was not read in the morning.

In a short time, however, Harol, the director of the Porte-Saint-Martin, did accept the rough draft of the drama before it was written; he would have welcomed anything signed by a name famous or notorious, for he was in a state of chronic and impudent bankruptcy. He it was who, meeting Louis XVIII. in the *coulisses*, coolly stopped him to beg a loan of thirty thousand francs. "M. Harol," replied the king with a smile, "I was just coming to you with the same request!"

Balzac took lodgings near the theatre, hired a copyist for the first time in his life, and set to work; but spite of his protests each scene had to be written and rewritten to suit the manager's fancy, and to flatter the vanity of each individual actor, and two months and a half of this

irksome labour strangely altered him. *Vautrin* was ready for representation on the 14th of March, 1840, and never, says Gozlan, since the appearance of Hugo's early dramas, had public curiosity been so excited—for the night even politics were forgotten. Balzac foolishly tried to pack the house, his enemies heard of the *ruse*, and were present in swarms. His friendly *claqueurs* were awed with portents of disapprobation, till, on the appearance of a Mexican general, in a head-dress that gave him an outrageous resemblance to Louis XVIII., a storm of hisses was evoked that lasted to the end of the piece, and politically damned it.

Next morning Gozlan called at the Jardies to see the discomfited dramatist. Balzac was sauntering up and down his garden, with a smile on his lips, and apparently cool and collected, though with hands and face burning as in a fever. "My dear friend," he began quickly, "look at that ridge close to my wall. In a few days I shall establish a large dairy there to supply the best possible milk to the richest inhabitants only. I shall buy the finest milch cows in the world, and I shall clear three thousand francs a year. There, opposite, I shall plant vines, and on the ground to the right, vegetables; three thousand francs for vegetables, twelve thousand for grapes, three thousand for milk, what do you call that?" "Eighteen thousand francs if I am not mistaken." "You are not mistaken! Now look for a moment at that magnificent walnut-tree!" "I won't!" said Gozlan flatly, "you have told me all about that a hundred times!" Well, well," replied Balzac, "two thousand a year for that

—twenty thousand in all. See what shifts I am reduced to by the interdict of *Vautrin*." And, having thus eased his mind, he explained that the government censor had written to forbid any further performance on account of the political undercurrent, chiefly discernible in that unfortunate head-dress. Hugo, Dumas, and other eminent men interfered, and at last the government offered an indemnity, but this Balzac was too proud to accept. For a moment his dreams of wealth were over, and, sick of everything, he escaped to Russia for consolation. On his return he was compelled to sell even the Jardies.

Twice more did he attempt to win dramatic laurels, but never with any signal success.

During these long years the primitive idea of the *Études des Mœurs* had been taking definite form as the *Comédie humaine*. For a while Balzac thought the title too audacious, too presumptuous, and, with all his courage and pride, he faltered and hesitated before adopting the name that would make all his books into one book—a true Natural History of Man, where manners should be classified as animals had been, and which should embrace at once the history and the criticism of society, the analysis of its evils, the discussion of its principles.

In this Cuvier-like system, all his works fall easily into their due place, and he lived almost long enough to complete the programme. This is the list after his own classification, and according to which the current editions are published :—

Scènes de la vie privée	...	...	8 *volumes*
Scènes de la vie de province	...	...	9 „

Scènes de la vie parisienne	8	*volumes*
Scènes de la vie politique	3	„
Scènes de la vie militaire	1	„
Scènes de la vie de campagne	3	„
Études philosophiques...	6	„
Études analytiques	2	„

Forty closely printed volumes in all for the *Comédie humaine*, besides three for the *Contes drôlatiques*, two for the *Théâtre* and ten for the *Œuvres de Jeunesse*.

Although his enemies laughed at the idea of unity, gibed at what he termed his "Great Work," as being so many isolated contributions dragged together, there are, in spite of his untimely death, scarcely any omissions beyond a hiatus in the military section, the plan of which was already arranged.

An audacious attempt truly for any single man, this *Comédie humaine*, but one of those audacities that command success. How shall it be possible for us in our scanty study, with pages not equal in number to the novels under consideration, to give the faintest idea of the whole scope of the work. We can only attempt to resume the salient recollections that our studies of his writings and of his truest critics have left on our minds. It is impossible to do more, and the better a novelist the more difficult the task. Some writers incessantly reproduce themselves, and we have their lives and works as one, but Balzac had the happy power of throwing himself altogether into his characters, of wearing their clothes, of walking in their shoes—he was a historian simply, no longer an individual.

Upon this latter point an unbiassed critic must insist,

as Balzac invariably insisted. He wrote not for the pleasures of imagination but for the archives of history; his romances are but frame and pretext for an examination of the ideas, the feelings, the practices, the customs, the laws, the arts, the trades, the very accessories and local habitations of modern life—in short, of all that constitutes the contemporary world; and, thanks to him, no epoch, probably, will ever be so well known to posterity as ours. "With Shakespeare and St. Simon," says M. Taine, "Balzac is the greatest storehouse of documents upon human nature that we possess." Essentially a painter of manners, his prodigious memory and descriptive skill bring forward the slightest details of existence —its petty miseries, its common-place realities, its life-long sacrifices (never to be seen, never to be acknowledged, and never meant to be) with a marvellous truth.

He was so full of life himself that his power of creation (but only that which he had witnessed) is astounding. His men and his women are flesh and blood, quick and instinct with passions great and petty—even his surroundings can never be mistaken. We could swear that each of his models was before him when he wrote, not posing as to a strange artist, but before him always and everywhere without restraint. We feel that the dingy rooms behind all their mystery of suburban blinds; that the weed-grown gardens, hemmed in by dim black walls; that the long, narrow, deserted village streets, with only here and there a pair of prying female eyes; that all the luxuries of his pleasure-haunts—their furniture, their curtains, their carpets, their pictures,

their bric-à-brac, and whatnot—were actually present to his eyes. True, he wrote for a French public; his characters are French, his scenery, his surroundings, but the meaning of them all is universal.

There are about two thousand characters in Balzac's great work, but there are no wire-pulled puppets. At Venice, one year, the masquers dressed "after Balzac," and he lasted them for a whole winter; and half the courts of Europe followed suit. Even now forty of his characters are better known to every boulevard lounger than the famous forty of the Academy. To write an epic you must live an epic, to describe as a universalist you must be a universalist, and Balzac was everything, at all events tried to be something of everything —anatomist, physiologist, physiognomist, mesmerist, mystic.

But still he had one key-note to which all his studies are tuned. "Passion," he declares, "is the sum-total of humanity. Without it, religion, history, romance, art, would be sterile." "To him," says M. Taine, "passions and interests were the motive powers of the world; courtesy adorns them, hypocrisy disguises, cunning covers them with fine names, but out of every ten actions nine are egotistical;" and consequently the passions he best paints are the petty passions of common life. Witness the perfect declension of his male and female misers. He is fond, too, of probing the more morbid moods; his doctors are best pleased when they discover some strange, unknown malady, and he is like his doctors,

He strives hard to be neither moral nor immoral. Like Goethe, he is a great naturalist, treating the world as a botanist would plants. In his works we have no handy canons of poetical justice. He is content to take the world as he finds it, and to leave it as it is. His virtuous people often die wretched; his villains prosper to the last—pretty much as in real life. God and the devil never preside over his characters, but we have passions and lusts and vanities and meanesses on the one hand, and eternal self-sacrifice on the other. And on this his enemies chiefly based their attacks. Says one of them, "Balzac's humanity may thus be resumed—gold for God, self-interest for law, the senses for religion, and pleasure for a creed." But as Gautier declares indignantly—"books are made after morality—not morality after books. Do then green peas bring the springtime, or the springtime the green peas." "And after all," he continues, "has any writer ever added another capital sin?—are there not still seven?" Balzac simply studied the world without going into Utopian regions, and probably to a surgeon the development of a cancer is as beautiful as the flowering of a rose—at all events as worthy of attention. But with his fame this accusation of immorality increased. He wrote of men and women; he knew of nothing else worth writing of—he was intensely human and intensely modern. He held that an author should, and only can, describe his own times, his own world, of which he is part and parcel; not with the aid of lay figures and Birmingham accessories rig up a set scene of some mystical mediæval period, for the next

generation to thrust into the lumber loft as tawdry rubbish, meaning nothing. He thought this when the romantic school was rampant, and he suffered for so thinking. What business had he with men and women at all! Sex may be very well in its way, but when petticoats and trousers came into vogue, the great passions that govern human life were also to be eternally draped and clothed; but as far only as literature went, for the painter may say all he dare, and the sculptor all he can. "O who," as the satirist asks, "who shall deliver us from men and women?"

However, Balzac certainly felt this censure more and more as if it pressed against a raw wound somewhere. "I don't invent my characters," he pleads, "ask our civilization about them. I write for men not for young girls. Let them quote a page where religion or the family are attacked. Of what torments are successes made; but why after all complain." And when again they twitted him that he had described scenes and social plagues and infamies best left alone, or left at least to specialists who write for men of science, not certainly to be treated in novels which every girl might read—he claimed to be a specialist in some cases, and in all to be a naturalist; he declared that he did not write for young girls, "*Les petites filles! les petites filles!* mon Dieu!" cries Asselineau defending Baudelaire, "is there not a whole literature made to order for them? Are there not special writers who, by vocation or hunger, do nothing but compose goody-goody, twaddling stories—special writers for babies, special writers even for grown women." And

a necessary branch of literature, too—Balzac himself went into it; for his sister's children, *les jolies gazelles*, as he called them, he wrote his *Nouvelles et Contes moraux* and he forbade them to read his other works. These *Nouvelles* were written for them, just as the other works were written for other people.

Many of Balzac's plots are so clever that the ordinary reader is lost in them. One must be a merchant to understand *César Birotteau;* a French police-magistrate to follow *Une ténébreuse affaire.* In the same way the technicalities of celibacy, matrimony, finance, luxury, ambition, and meanness, are all part of his philosophy. His imagination, rich in details, is poor in primary invention; and his talent is descriptive rather than dramatic; it is in his plays that these faults show most clearly, and hence their general failure. This Poe-like exactness of detail, as it is one of his merits is certainly his greatest artistic fault—and a fault exaggerated latterly with every new book he wrote. Even his details in personal description are often too minute. We cannot weep at Goriot's death, because we see too much, and, marvelling at our vision, feel too little. In matters of surroundings this minuteness gives rise to terrible *longueurs*—sometimes we have to read three-quarters of a volume to find the tale tagged on at the end, and very often there is a singular want of proportion.

His style smacks of his laborious process of composition, and is frequently tormented and painful, for he rarely translates his thoughts into the briefest and purest form. His expressions are often affected, and sometimes

in bad taste. Yet he came to believe in his own style, and to boast that "there are only three men who know French in Europe—Gautier, Hugo, and myself." We may at least be thankful for one thing—he never wrote his books in ejaculations, never sold them by the line.

Of the last few years of Balzac's life scarcely anything is known. By 1847 he had finished, as far as he was ever to finish, the *Comédie humaine.* Then the Countess Hanska's husband died, and for some months Balzac was away, his friends could only guess whither he had gone, for when she was concerned his lips were firmly sealed, Then for a short time he returned to Paris to pay off those famous debts that had so often almost crushed his life out, though he had laughed them off so cheerily. He hired a pretty little house in the *Rue Fortunée,* and fitted it up like a dainty love shrine with all the artistic luxuries he had best loved to describe. Gautier was the only friend admitted to see the treasures here. "Ah! we were right to say that you had millions hidden away somewhere," laughed Gautier. "I am poorer than ever," he replied humbly. "Nothing here belongs to me! I have furnished the house for an expected friend. I am only porter and housekeeper." But "when the house is finished death enters," and already Balzac suffered from the fatal malady that killed him. When Soulié died he exclaimed, "Poor Frederic! I shall die like you by the heart, and like you in the flower of my age!" Then he disappeared again for nearly two years; his friends heard that he had married the Countess Hanska, and the great mystery of his life was cleared up.

The sympathy of women had cheered him on through all his struggles; it was meet that a woman's love should solace his last moments.

The only trace left us of his married life is to be found in a letter written from Dresden, early in May, to the editor of the *Constitutionnel*, complaining of an attempt to pirate and reproduce *Vautrin*:—

"Dear Véron—One gets married seven hundred and fifty leagues away from Paris, in a country of absolute government; one expects to be safe at least from pillage, and here am I pillaged, defrauded of my rights, and betrayed like a very king.

"The enclosed letter will tell you how furious I am; I pray you insert it in the *Constitutionnel* as soon as it is to hand.

"Excuse this scrawl; I have a nervous affection in my eyes and in my heart; I am in a frightful state for a newly married man, but in this miserable affair I have one consolation—I can think of your good memory through all my journey.

"Oh! what lovely things there are here! I have already spent from between twenty-five thousand and thirty thousand francs for a *toilette*, which is a thousand times more beautiful than that of the Duchess of Parma. The goldsmiths of the middle ages are very superior to ours, and I have discovered some magnificent pictures. If I stay here much longer there will not be a cent of my wife's fortune left, for she has purchased a pearl collar which might turn an angel's head."

At the end of May, 1850, he returned to Paris, but woefully altered in appearance; he wanted, he said to come home to die, for he knew now that it was utterly hopeless to escape his old affection of the heart, exaggerated as it had been by over-work and by the terrible abuse of coffee as a means of defying sleep. For four months he lived on, serene and placid to the last, seeing all the new-born happiness of love, all the unhackneyed work that wealth would have ensured, drifting by without a murmur; he wrote a farewell line to Gautier—"I can neither read nor write, Balzac," and then, says his physician, he turned quietly for consolation to one of God's ministers. The last four and thirty hours were spent in horrible agony, in the presence of his wife and his sister Laura, faithful to the end, and on the 18th August, 1850, he passed away. His death was a public grief, though his life had never been recognized as a public benefit. Now they pulled down the name of his street and re-christened it the *Rue Balzac*, and now they ordained him a splendid funeral.

The pall-bearers were the most distinguished men in France—Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Alexander Dumas, and M. Baroche, Minister of the Interior; and in the the immense crowd of mourners, the Institute, the University, the learned societies, the "Société des Gens de Lettres," the "Société des Auteurs dramatiques," the Schools of Law and Medicine, were all represented. Even the Printers attended, mindful that he had once been one of them. Over the grave in Père La Chaise, Victor Hugo delivered the funeral oration:—

"This is no place to say what we might say of this kingly and splendid intellect. All his books are only one book—a book living, luminous, profound, in which, going to and fro, marching, moving with I know not what of the ghastly and terrible blended with the real, we have the whole of contemporary civilization. A marvellous book called by the author 'Comedy,' but which he might have well entitled 'History.' A book taking all forms, all styles, surpassing Tacitus and reaching to Suetonius, linking together Beaumarchais and Rabelais. A book where observation and imagination meet—prodigal of the true, the hidden, the common-place, the trivial, the natural. Balzac goes straight to his aim and grapples bodily with modern society, snatching something from all things—from some illusions, from others hopes; here a cry, and there a mask. He sounds the secret depths of man, the soul, the brain, the heart; and, by a singular feature of his free and vigorous nature, disentangles himself smiling and serene from those terrible struggles which to Molière brought melancholy and misanthropy to Rousseau. . . . His life was short, but full—fuller of works than days. This powerful and unwearied toiler, this philosopher, this thinker, this poet, this genius, has lived amongst us that life of storm and struggle, that life of quarrels and combats, common in all times to all our greatest men!"

V.

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

Our present study bears us to an entirely New World, as unlike the old as may be. A nation eager for material prosperity, and mad for the sudden acquirement of wealth; no trust in genius; no thought of culture; no aristocracy trained by long descent to encourage æsthetic tastes; no one capital city, not even the sorry companionship of a time-honoured Grub-street, where men of letters and artists of all grades might throng together, and together find that mutual efforts and defeats are but so many spurs to urge them onward. Nothing here acknowledged at this time but a struggling race of men, whose equality or inequality was measured by the "Almighty Dollar." And in the midst of a people like this, we have to follow the feverish career of one solitary, weakly foundling—from birth to death altogether alone; nurtured by the bounty of strangers till his slightest whim seemed law of heaven; then suddenly outcast with his individual wrongs and hopes and cravings. We have, year by year, to watch him as his genius develops, and his stubborn self-will grows stronger, drifting aimlessly from town to town, uselessly hurling himself against a wall of living precedents;

feeling that there is genius in him, but never able for two moments to give his mind free play; battling with no encouragement, no fellowship; wearing himself out incessantly with the wretched "hack-work" that should bring in a petty weekly pittance, till he tries to revive his dead illusions and his shattered hopes, to stay his unrelenting hunger and his oozing courage, by using alcohol, as Coleridge and De Quincey much about the same time used opium. Well! he suffered as he sinned, and his fellows were not slow to tell us of it; but, as Hannay says, "let solid excellence of the epitaph description remember, that perhaps all its parlour virtues are not worth one hour of Coleridge's remorse." If we do not all of us love our friends rather for their failings than their virtues—and to what mother is her weakliest child not dearest?—there are few at all events in whom, on a thoroughly close and intimate knowledge, we cannot find something to admire and love. Here, then, in this sketch of a most pitiful history—"much about a broken heart, all about unhappy things"—hiding nothing, extenuating nothing, we would fain set the man down in his true colours, more durably, more forcibly than if we had either power or will to whitewash his strange career with all the cardinal virtues.

The family of Poe was not only one of the most reputable in Baltimore, but, like many other of the Southern houses, came from a good old English stock. In former days one of the Poes had been court-physician to Queen Elizabeth, and even at present another branch belongs to the best county families in Ireland. The

poet's great-grandfather married a daughter of Admiral Macbride, famous in our naval history, and their son, the founder of the American house, became Quarter-master General in the Maryland army, at the time of the revolution, and acquired the special friendship of Lafayette. His fourth son, David Poe, while a law-student in Baltimore, fell violently in love with Elizabeth Arnold, an English actress, more remarkable for personal charms and vivacity than for histrionic power, who was then starring through the States. His friends interfered, with a threat of withdrawing his allowance; to this he retorted by throwing up the bar altogether, and running away with the young English beauty. He informed them immediately of his marriage, and was disowned by the whole family.

With beauty on one side, and adventure on the other, the penniless couple imagined that the whole world lay at their feet; and, to bring their destinies still more intimately together, David Poe betook himself to his wife's profession. For six or seven years they travelled restlessly from theatre to theatre throughout the States, but they had neither of them any real fitness for the stage, and they sank by degrees into a state of listless misery that was broken only, but not in anywise alleviated, by the birth of three children. Then, sick of life, starving, despondent, and wretched, they died of consumption, within a few weeks of each other.

EDGAR ALLAN POE, their third child, was born at Baltimore, in January, 1811, and if, as he himself says, "the spirit of romance—a spirit sinister and stormy,"

ever presided at a birth, it was certainly at his. Suckled on misery, borne about in long clothes from booth to theatre, already a little social pariah, the pet and plaything of the poor women in the green-rooms, he was nevertheless a beautiful child, with a precocious wit, and an odd genius for unlucky scrapes, when the death of his parents cast him naked upon the world, a puling, nameless, little mortal of three years, with not a relative who cared to own him. Happily, however, Providence has many caresses for motherless children, and a Mr. John Allan, a wealthy merchant and a kindly man, but childless, adopted the young orphan, and undertook the charge of his education and future life.

Like most adopted foundlings, the boy was thoroughly spoilt. He was christened, a rite his family seem to have forgotten, Edgar Allan Poe, the second name commemorating the second parents. His prattling words were household laws; Mrs. Allan became, in very truth, a mother to him, and it would have been strange, indeed, if this sudden transition from absolute poverty to all the luxuries and refinements of wealth, had not exercised a potent influence upon the formation of his character. He was sent to a dame's school, and when the poor old mistress attempted to punish him, according to the laws of the establishment, for some petty breach of discipline, Mr. Allan proceeded thither, and, before all the pupils lectured her upon the enormity of the insult. Thenceforward, the wayward little boy would submit to no laws but the laws of his own will.

In 1816 Mr. and Mrs. Allan came to England for a

few months, and their young charge accompanied them over the most interesting portions of Great Britain. When they returned to America, they determined, spite of their feelings, to leave him behind, to reap the advantages of an English education.

The school where he spent five of the most impressionable years of his life was kept by the Rev. John Bransby—better known to the boys as Dr. Bransby—lecturer or curate to the old parish church, Stoke Newington. The house is still standing in Church Street, and may be found by any one who enquires for the "New Manor House." *

Poe used always to assert, that in the powerful tale of "William Wilson," he had given an exact account of this school-house, and his boyish life there—of course we must take both as from the standpoint of a boyish memory—that, indeed, by William Wilson he meant only

* After much search in local histories and directories, old and new, we succeeded in identifying the house as one now occupied by a ladies' school. Flushed with the discovery, we went straightway to Church Street, and, asking for the husband of the schoolmistress, broke the news to him as gently as possible, that a great man, one Edgar Allan Poe, had been educated there. In defence of the establishment, he curtly replied, "Many great men have been educated here, sir—and one alderman. Pray who was Edgar Allan Poe?" Impressed by our explanation, but not enlightened, he proceeded to point out in answer to questions, but somewhat too gleefully, how the old entrance-hall had been swept away, the famous old schoolroom turned into a young ladies' dormitory, the boys' former dormitory into a public-house, how this improvement and that had been inaugurated by him, and how a grand old archway in the play-ground was disappearing without his intervention at all, and concluded, chuckling, "next week they are going to pull down Fairfax's (?) house opposite!" The alderman, who is still alive, exhibits a like placid indifference to the memory of a famous poet, once his school-fellow.

a second, a better self, and that by murdering him he slew his own thwarted and stifled conscience:—

"My earliest recollections of a school life, are connected with a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay embedded and asleep. It gives me, perhaps, as much of pleasure as I can now in any manner experience, to dwell upon minute recollections of the school and its concerns. . . . .

"Let me then remember. The house, I have said, was old and irregular. The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, topped with a bed of mortar and broken glass, encompassed the whole. This prison-like rampart formed the limit of our domain; beyond it we saw but thrice a week—once every Saturday afternoon, when, attended by two ushers, we were permitted to take brief walks in a body through some of the neighbouring fields—and twice during Sunday, when we were paraded in the same formal manner to the morning and evening service in the one church of the village. Of this church the principal of our school was pastor. With

how deep a spirit of wonder and perplexity was I wont to regard him from our remote pew in the gallery, as, with step solemn and slow, he ascended the pulpit! This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast, could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution! At an angle of the ponderous wall frowned a more ponderous gate. It was riveted and studded with iron bolts, and surmounted with jagged iron spikes. What impressions of deep awe did it inspire! It was never opened save for the three periodical egressions and ingressions already mentioned; then, in every creak of its mighty hinges, we found a plenitude of mystery—a world of matter for solemn remark, or for more solemn meditation. The extensive enclosure was irregular in form, having many capacious recesses. Of these, three or four of the largest constituted the play-ground. It was level, and covered with fine hard gravel. I well remember it had no trees, nor branches, nor anything similar within it. Of course it was in the rear of the house. In front lay a small parterre, planted with box and other shrubs; but through this sacred division we passed only upon rare occasions indeed—such as a first advent to school or final departure thence, or perhaps, when a parent or friend having called for us, we joyfully took our way home for the Christmas or Midsummer holidays. But the house!—how quaint an old building

was this!—to me how veritably a palace of enchantment! There was really no end to its windings—to its incomprehensible subdivisions. It was difficult at any given time to say with certainty upon which of its two storeys one happened to be. From each room to every other there were sure to be found three or four steps either in ascent or descent. Then the lateral branches were innumerable —inconceivable—and so returning in upon themselves, that our most exact ideas in regard to the whole mansion were not very far different from those with which we pondered upon infinity. During the five years of my residence here, I was never able to ascertain with precision in what remote locality lay the little sleeping apartment assigned to myself and some eighteen or twenty other scholars. The school-room was the largest in the house —I could not help thinking, in the world. It was very long, narrow, and dismally low, with pointed Gothic windows and a ceiling of oak.

"In childhood I must have felt with the energy of a man what I now find stamped upon memory in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the *exergues* of the Carthaginian medals. Yet in fact—in the fact of the world's view—how little was there to remember. The morning's awakening, the nightly summons to bed; the connings, the recitations; the periodical half-holidays and perambulations; the play-ground, with its broils, its pastimes, intrigues; these, by a mental sorcery long forgotten, were made to involve a wilderness of sensation, a world of rich incident, an universe of varied emotion, of excitement the most passionate and spirit-stirring. '*Oh, le bon temps, que ce siècle de fer!*' . . . .

"In truth the ardour, the imperiousness of my disposition soon rendered me a marked character among my schoolmates, and by slow but natural gradations gave me an ascendancy over all not greatly older than myself."

This English education powerfully influenced Poe's genius, and probably gave him as a child that distaste for democratic principles which afterwards procured him so many enemies.

In 1822 he returned to the Allans, and then passed three years at an academy in Richmond, under the best masters of the town. It was at this time that he first met his cousin, Virginia Clemm:—

> "*I* was a child, and *she* was a child
> In this kingdom by the sea."

Now that the son was heir presumptive to a large fortune, his relatives chose to overlook the father's misalliance, and the two cousins were constantly thrown together, nay, even for a time he seems to have lodged in his aunt's house. This childish passion awakened the spirit of poetry in his heart, and some of his published productions actually date from his fourteenth year. There were, as he describes in *Eleonora*, which he alleges to have been autobiographical, wanderings, hand in hand, by the resonant seashore, by the river, and through the valley—a boyish fairyland invested by their young imaginations with the attributes of mystery, and the titles of romance; for to them the river was the "river of silence," creeping noiselessly for centuries over the self-same pebbles, and the valley, the "valley of the many-

coloured grass," carpeted all by soft green verdure, and besprinkled with the yellow buttercup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby-red asphodel; and, here and there, like wildernesses of dreams, sprang up groves and clumps of huge-leaved trees, bathed each noontime in the glamour of a tropic sun, with a flood of every shade of gold and green and silver. The great fact in Poe's youth is his marvellous precocity; like Byron, his sentiments, his feelings, his very passions, seem to have been freely awakened at a period when other lads were playing marbles or leap-frog, and his verse speaks of his life again when he urges that, though they were children both,

> "Our love it was stronger by far than the love
> Of those who were older than we,
> Of many far wiser than we."

These halcyon days, probably the happiest in his stormy life, did not last long, for in 1825 he entered at the University of Charlottesville, then chiefly noted for the recklessness and wildness of its students.*

* The year of Poe's admission here is rather apt to shake our confidence in the almost universally accepted date of his birth, for by this time he could only have been between fourteen and fifteen. But in the American Colleges the students probably entered at the same early date as at our English Universities a couple of centuries ago, and probably in the same intent—not many men were then able to waste more than their youth in college days; nor did the authorities care to receive students whom it was impossible to control. Poe certainly supplied this date to his biographers in the first place, and then certainly left it uncontradicted. There were two exceptions: once wishing to render his first volume more of a youthful marvel than it undoubtedly was, he wrote 1813 down as his birth-year; at another time, with probably an after-

The lad fresh from a country school, full of eagerness for all new experiences of life, and with but little rule of conduct, threw himself in with the worst set, and outvied even the oldest. If we might place credence in his unfriendly biographers there was not a vice in the whole catalogue of human sins that this boy-student of fourteen or fifteen did not hasten to commit; and yet with all these he was in the first rank for scholarship, had a wonderful aptitude for the physical and mathematical sciences, much skill in drawing, and was, too, the readiest declaimer there —dividing his time, as Powell says, "between lectures, debating societies, rambles in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and in making caricatures of his tutors, and the heads of the colleges." If he really did waste his nights over cards and wines and worse things, it is somewhat startling to find that he not only more than held his own in the class-room, but that he was expert at fence, and widely noted for feats of strength and activity. One of these feats takes a leaf from Byron's wreath, for Poe on a hot June day swam from Richmond to Warwick, *seven miles and a half*, against a tide running probably from two to three miles an hour. When, in his lifetime, the newspapers questioned the truth of this statement, the following certificate was published by a distinguished gentleman of Virginia :—

"I was one of several who witnessed this swimming feat. We accompanied Mr. Poe in boats. Messrs. Robert

wish of some sort, he states it as 1809. These two errors fairly cancel, and we are obliged to accept the unanimous testimony of all his biographers, in spite of the extraordinary precocity which this involves.

Stannard, John Lyle (since dead), Robert Saunders, John Munford, I think, and one or two others, were also of the party. Mr. P. did not seem at all fatigued, and *walked* back to Richmond immediately after the feat—which was undertaken for a wager.

"ROBERT G. CABELL."

Rake, scholar, wit, caricaturist, and athlete notwithstanding, he had another claim to the notice of his fellow-undergraduates, for he was already a poet, writing verses that in their purity, simplicity, and daintiness have rarely been surpassed. How, putting on one side all question of marvellous precocity, how did this young devil-me-care, battledored, as they would have us believe, from one evil passion to another, come to write such beautifully pure lines as these to a girl?—yet they were certainly penned before he left Charlottesville:—

"TO HELEN.

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore,
That gently o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

"Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand!
The agate lamp within thy hand,
Ah! Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy Land!"

In spite of all the follies he undoubtedly did commit, he was regarded by both dons and students as likely to graduate with the highest possible honours. His allowance had been amply generous, and yet, shortly before the final examination, it was discovered that he had gambled extravagantly beyond his means, and he was suddenly expelled. *Alma Mater*, no matter when or where, never seems to have been a tender mother to poetic genius, and few there are who have acquired a really wide renown in poetry who ever left the university with a graduate's degree. Why even now, and for more than a dozen years, one of the greatest, probably, and certainly the most inspired, of living English singers, has headed the roll of those who should be honoured at his college—and has, as far as the University goes, headed it in vain.

Mr. Allan received Poe with a not unkindly feeling, considering the painful circumstances, but this was gradually altered to a stern displeasure as draft after draft representing the lad's gambling debts came due; till, outworn in patience and tried in purse, he declined to honour any further presentation of the gaming bills. Poe, with something more than his usual impetuosity, left a cutting and satirical letter behind, and, quitting an ungrateful country, took ship for the Mediterranean to free the Greeks from Turkish tyranny—a precious undertaking truly for a dashing young poet of barely seventeen! What led him to this strange step, whether he was, again like Byron, fired by a generous enthusiasm, or whether, as so many other poets of this century, he

was irresistibly attracted by the legendary fascinations of the East, we know not; neither do we in any way know what he did there. We may, however, imagine that these travels to the sun-lands gave a new splendour to his talents, and that to this journey he owes something, at all events, of those glowing colours that sparkle through his writings as a blaze of many-hued fireworks flashes against a summer evening's sky. "I like," says Hannay, "I like to think of Poe in the East. With his passionate love of the beautiful—in 'the year of April blood,' in a climate which has the perpetual luxury of a bath—he must have had all his perceptions of the lovely intensified wonderfully." And yet without this internal evidence of later writings, whether he did ever reach the Mediterranean would be doubtful, for his European history is a blank, and the Life Letters and Adventures long announced for publication by Mr. T. C. Clarke have never yet appeared. All we are told, and of this we are half sceptical, is that he eventually turned up as far from his destination as might be, at St. Petersburg, without a passport, and that, being compromised in a scrape of some sort, whether a political plot or a mere drunken riot has been much disputed, he was compelled to appeal to Mr. Middleton, the American Minister, who obtained his liberty and forwarded him forthwith to his friends in Virginia.

Mr. Allan received the runaway with a very natural coolness. For eighteen years he had been lenient to a fault, and now that the lad was growing up in all the wilfulness of a singularly erratic disposition, he was

becoming somewhat sick of his self-imposed charge. However, Mrs. Allan, ever a tender mother, and the only being besides Virginia Clemm whose opinion Poe really valued one iota, lay on her death-bed, and for her sake the breach between the two was apparently bridged over; and when in February, 1829, she died, her husband, for her sake still, endeavoured to do his duty to the reckless youngster, and as Poe, chiefly because there was little peace at home, expressed a preference for a military career, he used his influence to obtain a scholarship at West Point Military Academy.

Here, as before, Poe was distinguished for ability and attainment, and became a prime favourite with officers, professors, and comrades, startling them all somewhat by publishing a volume of poems, which at once riveted the attention of all critical America; and yet he was only eighteen, for the volume bears upon its title-page "Baltimore, 1829," many of the pieces having been written three or four years previously. Some few of them even had been issued in a tiny tome in 1827, which, from its almost absolute rarity, appears to have been printed privately for friends—not for circulation.

While this juvenile volume exhibited, almost necessarily, evident signs of contemporary writers, and while the poems had but little spiritual feeling or human emotion, "there was already for all who could feel and appreciate English poetry that calmness of melancholy, that delicious solemnity, which characterize the master-singers." * Each verse has a dreamy, nebulous rhythm,

* Charles Baudelaire.

each poem perfect in form, with an individual music of its own. And then, the wild flowers themselves were not purer, for, be his life what it might, Poe never penned a line in prose or verse that our hyper-critics might stigmatize or defend as "sensual" or "sensuous." We have had the good fortune to unearth one poem from this precious little volume, which has never in England or America been reprinted in any subsequent edition.*

"SPIRITS OF THE DEAD.

"Thy soul shall find itself alone
'Mid dark thoughts of the grey tombstone—
Not one of all the crowd to pry
Into thine hour of secresy.

"Be silent in that solitude,
Which is not loneliness—for then
The spirits of the dead who stood
In life before thee, are again
In death around thee—and their will
Shall overshadow thee: be still!

"The night—tho' clear—shall frown,
And the stars shall look not down
From their high thrones in the heaven,
With light like hope to mortals given—
But thy red orbs without beam,
To thy weariness shall seem
As a burning and a fever
Which would cling to thee for ever:

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* See Appendix for the first drafts of some of the more famous poems —in themselves almost new poems to us—and for bibliographical notes.

"Now are thoughts thou shalt not banish—
Now are visions ne'er to vanish—
From thy spirit shall they pass
No more—like dewdrops from the grass:

"The breath—the breath of God is still—
And the mist upon the hill
Shadowy—shadowy—yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token—
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!"

The praise this little volume obtained led him to believe that he might succeed in literature, and this again to a laxity in military discipline. Soon he not only neglected his duties and his studies, but broke out into all his old sins of gaming and dissipation.

The Americans have, perhaps, stricter and more primitive ideas in the conduct of their military colleges than has latterly been here exhibited, and in the beginning of 1830 the unfortunate youth was, for the second time, cashiered.

Burning with shame, and heavy at heart, he returned to Richmond, where, to his intense mortification, he found that Mr. Allan had already married again, and that a girl of eighteen was installed in the place of her whom for so many years he had known as mother. The situation was perhaps difficult, but Poe's conduct was certainly unjustifiable, for he sarcastically ridiculed the marriage, and refused to speak to the lady. Mr. Allan felt the insult like a blow, and heartily sick of the worries Poe had entailed—with the prospect now, too, of children of his own—turned him forthwith out of doors, declining to

assist or even see him any more; thus hastily, but not altogether unnaturally, cancelling a debt of obligation that had lasted for some nineteen years. Poe's enemies afterwards tried to cast a deeper shadow upon the nature of the quarrel, but the story was never in any way endorsed by the only people interested, and may be added unheard to the many calumnies from which the unhappy author had through all his life to suffer.

Free at last to follow every inclination of his own, to achieve fame, perhaps fortune and happiness, with no other hydra in the way but a penniless purse, Poe determined to adopt that literary career which had lately so often dazzled and attracted him—in fact no other career was possible. The present might be gloomy, but the future of hope gleamed brighter than the past of patronage. Great critics had told him that his first volume was full of the promises at all events of a genius altogether higher than America had yet produced. With a credential like this he imagined that journals would open their columns to him, and publishers their arms. Poor little thin octavos! What disillusions are there before the world sees anything of worth between your sorry boards of green and purple! And yet almost every writer of note, more or less unsuccessfully, begins his literary life with such a volume, for poetry is the old and sacred language in which the masters of all eloquence have babbled out their early dreams—expressing far more readily, more naturally, than prose, the desires, the joys, the griefs of youth, for "poetry is winged, and youth has wings."

A kindly critic, remembering perhaps his own struggling years, says a word of praise; a dozen friends purchase, not altogether unreluctantly, a dozen copies, and our young tyro has drifted off into the stormy sea of authorship. He attacks editors and publishers with volleys of manuscripts, written each as his brain and heart had prompted; and he is told, if indeed any reply be vouchsafed, that such things are very nice in their way, mere luxuries not at all in demand—"toothpicks, I calls 'em," said the late Mr. Hotten to an ingenuous young poet—and is recommended, if he really wishes to become a money-making man of letters, to write on pig-iron, sewage, or what not; compile indices, "do the police-courts," or concoct "blood and thunder stories." Now it happened that Poe could write "blood and thunder stories," as they had never been written before, and after trying this, that, and the other, he tried them, but even here he found that an apprenticeship had to be gone through, a reputation of some sort attained.

It is doubtful at this time whether he even obtained the insertion in some impecunious print of any of his manuscripts, but it is scarcely matter of doubt that he never touched one cent of honorarium. How he managed to drag on life at all we cannot tell; probably some poor souls gave him of their poverty; at all events, college chums and summer friends had utterly dropped the man who so recently had been a boon companion, a brilliant leader in every dashing frolic.

Yet, even at his worst, when he could not get payment for the veriest hack-work, he had the grim satisfaction of

learning that his poems had successfully gone through a pirated edition in New York.

Edgar Allan Poe in some dismal Baltimore attic is scarcely a pleasant spectacle. Day by day he sat there, growing paler and thinner and hungrier, vainly trying to put his pen to paper as the ghosts of his dead hopes came up to twit him with the chances he had so misused, till he grew to hate his chances, hate his fellows, hate himself. And, night by night, the dose increasing as his prospects lessened, he tried to restore some power to his weary brain, to escape for a moment from his wretchedness, and hide again among the dear old illusions, with a draught from the hideous waters of forgetfulness, till every morrow, as he tossed on his straw pallet, he cursed himself as a drunkard as well as a misanthrope.

For some three months this lethargy of despair and starvation lasted; then, driven by sheer hunger, he bethought him that his military education would at least give him roof and bread, and he enlisted as a common soldier.

For a time this change after utter misery was pleasant. Like Coleridge he beguiled the tedium of military life by literary composition, but by degrees his hatred of all discipline returned; the companionship and commands of his coarse comrades became unbearable, and just as his friends, who had thought it time at last to track him out, were going to institute proceedings for his release, he took matters into his own hands, and quietly deserted, with a precious bundle of manuscript tales under his arm.

We soon find him back again at Baltimore, seeking a publisher for these tales, wherein he had exhausted that store of physical and mathematical science, for which at the University and Academy he had been so eminent. "Weird compositions are they," says Baudelaire, "created to prove that weirdness is an integral part of the beautiful."

Some little "hack-work" fell into his hands, and at last he found a publisher who, professing readiness to undertake the issue of the volume, kept the unfortunate author in a state of cruel suspense for more than a twelvemonth. All this time he waited and worked, leaving not a stone unturned, and at last a real chance came; for in reply to an advertisement in the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor*, of two prizes, one for the best tale, the other for the best poem, he forwarded no less than six stories and a copy of verses. When the prize committee met, a Mr. Kennedy was tempted by the beautiful caligraphy to dip into a little bundle of MSS., and it was decided, without further consideration, to give the premium to "the first of geniuses who had written legibly." The prize tale, when the mottoes in the envelope betrayed the secret, proved to be Poe's MS. *Found in a Bottle;* the prize poem, Poe's *Coliseum*—only one prize, however, was awarded—and the result was published in October, 1833.

Mr. Kennedy learnt enough from the publisher to become interested in the young author, who was accordingly brought to his office. "Thin and pale," says Griswold, "even to ghastliness, his whole appearance

indicated sickness and the utmost destitution. A well-worn frock-coat concealed the absence of a shirt, and imperfect boots disclosed the want of hose. But the young man's eyes were luminous with intelligence and feeling, and his voice and conversation and manners all won upon the lawyer's regard." Kennedy, moved and touched, at once accompanied him to a clothing store, and left him at a bath, "from which he returned with the suddenly regained style of a gentleman."

The three members of the committee resolved to find their *protégé* an opportunity of utilizing his literary abilities, and put what little work they could in his way. In 1834, a Mr. White established the *Southern Literary Messenger* at Richmond, and applied to Kennedy for an article. Kennedy advised Poe to forward something, and he followed up his advice with a kindly letter of introduction :—

"He is very clever with his pen—classical and scholar-like. He wants experience and direction, but I have no doubt he can be made very useful to you. And poor fellow he is very poor. . . . . This young fellow is very imaginative, and a little given to the *terrific*. He is at work upon a tragedy, but I have turned him to drudging upon whatever may make money, and I have no doubt you and he will find your account in each other."

This fact White soon discovered, for in the very next number he announces that the editorial department has been submitted to a gentleman "of approved literary taste and attainments," who would "devote his exclusive

attention" to the work. However, spite of this "exclusive attention," or rather of its announcement, Poe continued to reside at Baltimore until September, 1835, when he eagerly accepted an offer to remove to Richmond :—

"You ask me if I would be willing to come on to Richmond if you should have occasion for my services duting the coming winter. I reply that nothing would give me greater pleasure. I have been desirous for some time past of paying a visit to Richmond, and would be glad of any reasonable excuse for so doing. Indeed I am anxious to settle myself in that city, and if, by any chance, you hear of a situation likely to suit me, I would gladly accept it, were the salary even the merest trifle. I should, indeed, feel myself greatly indebted to you if through your means I could accomplish this object. What you say in the conclusion of your letter, in relation to the supervision of proof-sheets, gives me reason to hope that possibly you might find something for me to do in your office. If so, I should be very glad—for at present only a very small portion of my time is employed."

Accordingly, at the age of two-and-twenty, he found himself at Richmond as sole editor of a review, the entire destinies of which depended upon his personal efforts. Speedily, indeed, he established its prosperity, and for two years he enthralled his public with the marvellous energy with which he poured forth tales and poems, of a mystery all his own ; reviews, whose cutting sarcasm raised enemies far and near ; and articles discussing literature and science in their every branch—and

for these and for the weary editorial duties he received five hundred dollars per annum — something over a hundred pounds. Yet he writes gratefully to White— "You ask me if I am perfectly satisfied with your course. I reply that I am—entirely. My poor services are not worth what you give for them." A fair measure this of his former misery.

Now that he was earning a competence, definite though scanty, he dared again to seek out his boyhood's love, that cousin Virginia, whose childish remembrance he had treasured as something sacred through the troublous years of follies and wretchedness. He had left her a child, he found her now a woman, still "artless and innocent as the brief life she had led among the flowers." They went again through the old walks, at first half shyly and not "hand in hand," till the old thoughts came back with the richer meanings of maidenhood and manhood, till involuntarily one evening their lips met, and they sat down,—

"Locked in each other's embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees, and looked down within the waters of the river of silence at our images therein. We spoke no words during the rest of that sweet day; and our words, even upon the morrow, were tremulous and few. We had drawn the god Eros from the wave, and now we felt that he had enkindled within us the fiery souls of our forefathers. The passions which had for centuries distinguished our race, came thronging with the fancies for which they had been equally noted, and together breathed a delicious bliss over the valley of the many-

coloured grass. A change fell upon all things. Strange, brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flower had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened; and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up in place of them ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel."

With feelings like this in his heart, Poe declined utterly to listen to the monitions and warnings of his friends—he had not consulted them—ever holding advice of that kind at its cheapest; his passionate love, his wilful spirit, were too strong for sober calculations as to how far a beggarly stipend would support a wife and family, and then—as always—the future lay before them. He and his cousin wished to marry, and to them that was argument enough.

At the time of his marriage Poe is said to have been singularly handsome, though his whole being was marked with an indefinable stamp of melancholy, the beauty of the face consisting above all else in that characteristic delicacy belonging only to genius or high blood. The forehead massive and very white; the eyes large, of an indecisive dark colour approaching violet, full of depth yet brilliant; the mouth though slightly smiling very sad; the chin and lower portion of the face soft and indecisive; the complexion pale, not unhealthily, but of that clear, dark pallor beneath which intense energy and life so often lie concealed; in body, below the middle height, slight and wiry, rarely adapted for all physical exercise, yet with the feet and hands of a woman; everything about him was characteristic—physiognomy, walk,

gesture. "He was," says Baudelaire, "one of those men whom Nature, in expectation of great things, has endowed with an energetic temperament, just as she gives a strong vitality to the trees which stand as symbols of grief and mourning; for these men with an outward appearance sometimes almost pitiable are built as athletes, good for orgie or for toil, quick to excess and capable of astonishing sobriety."

We have little record of his early married life. We know that his wife, and even his mother-in-law, who from the first was one of the family, idolized him, and that they were very kind and gentle to his failings; and sore need there was for kindliness and gentleness, for the habit of drinking, contracted idly in the laughing hours of jovial fellowship, and continued as a vain solace in the moments of darkest despair, came back again at times with an irresistible madness. A mere boy he had lightly sold his soul to the devil of drink, and all the resolution of manhood could not redeem him from the compact. For weeks he would work hard and steadily without touching a drop of liquor until he imagined that he was strong enough to resist temptation, and then, cursing his poverty and his fate, he would be irresistibly carried away into a violent outbreak of intemperance that rendered him incapable of putting pen to paper. Mr. White, though cautious and parsimonious, had acquired a genuine liking for his talented young editor, probably, knowing something of his value, and treated him with great consideration. Bearing date soon after Poe's arrival in Richmond we find the first kindly letter:—

"I am sorry to see you in such plight as your letter shows you in. It is strange that just at this time, when everybody is praising you, and when fortune is beginning to smile upon your hitherto wretched circumstances, you should be invaded by these blue devils. It belongs, however, to your age and temper to be thus buffeted—but be assured, it only wants a little resolution to master the adversary for ever. You will doubtless do well henceforth in literature, and add to your *comforts* as well as to your reputation, which it gives me great pleasure to assure you is everywhere rising in popular esteem."

Letter after letter follows, with more of encouragement than reproach. But at last, after a week's intoxication, White dismissed his editor. Poe wrote imploringly piteous letters; friends intervened, and the proprietor answered with a most judicious consideration :—

"My dear Edgar—I cannot address you in such language as this occasion and my feelings demand: I must be content to speak to you in my plain way. That you are sincere in all your promises I firmly believe. But when you once again tread these streets, I have my fears that your resolutions will fail, and that you will again drink till your senses are lost. If you rely on your strength you are gone. Unless you look to your Maker for help you will not be safe. How much I regretted parting from you is known to Him only and myself. I had become attached to you; I am still; and I would willingly say return, did not a knowledge of your past life make me dread a speedy renewal of our separation. If you would make yourself contented with quarters in

my house, or with any other private family, where liquor is not used, I should think there was some hope for you. But if you go to a tavern, or to any place where it is used at table, you are not safe. You have fine talents, Edgar, and you ought to have them respected, as well as yourself. Learn to respect yourself, and you will soon find that you are respected. Separate yourself from the bottle, and from bottle companions, for ever. Tell me if you can and will do so. If you again become an assistant in my office, it must be understood that all engagements on my part cease the moment you get drunk.—I am your true friend. "T. W. W."

A new contract was entered into, but again and again Poe, in his miserable weakness, broke out into his old irregularities, and in January, 1837, he was compelled to say farewell to the readers of the *Messsenger*, as far, at least, as editorial capacity was concerned, for its columns were never closed to him, and he always exhibited a kindly feeling for the journal which had given him his start in life, and from time to time he sent them some of his best productions. Long after this, the *Messenger* undertook the defence of his memory, and, at a time when friendly tongues were silent, gallantly paid him a well-earned tribute :—

"Thanks to him, no similar enterprise ever prospered so largely in its *inception*, and we doubt if any, in the same length of time, even *Blackwood* in the days of Dr. Maginn, ever published so many shining articles from the same pen—poems, fantastic tales, criticism merciless and slashing; and these latter, though gaining subscribers

for the review, did not certainly gain friends for the critic. Here began the opposition that followed him throughout his life, and that pretended to ignore his genius while even the *Athenæum* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* were warmly appreciating him."

There is probably only one parallel to Poe's editorship of the *Messenger*, and that was the more recent conduct of the *Overland Monthly* by that other American genius, Bret Harte.

From Richmond Poe went to Baltimore: always in his most wretched plights he appears to have returned thither—as a young fox hard pressed invariably makes for the hole where he was born—or perhaps he went for the consolation that comparative thoughts of still deeper misery afforded. Henceforward his future life was similar to the past, and we watch him striking his tent like a nomad of the desert and carrying his light penates hither and hither throughout the Union—"an orbitless planet," rolling incessantly from Richmond to Baltimore, from Baltimore to Philadelphia, from Philadelphia to New York; and everywhere, amid fits of starvation and depression, editing reviews or contributing to periodicals.

At Baltimore he was tolerably successful; a long article was accepted by the *New York Review*, and the story of "Arthur Gordon Pym," which had been commenced in the *Messenger*, was, before its conclusion there, printed in full by the Harpers. This volume narrates the incidents of a voyage to the South Pacific and the pretended discovery of new land in the extreme Antarctic

regions. The appearance of its inhabitants as differing from all other known races of men, the peculiarities of climate, the novelty of the plants, the strangeness of the animals, the singular formations of the rocks, are all minutely and scientifically described in the very words of an eye-witness. Scrupulously correct as to technical nautical terms, it exhibits a surprising accuracy of detail —evidently based upon "Robinson Crusoe"—which is its greatest charm. To crown the verisimilitude of the sketch the hero dies—after having consented, for the sake of seeing his discoveries published, that Poe should issue the work as a story of his own—the concluding pages of the manuscript are supposed to be lost, and thus all means of detecting the imposture cut off. As Poe's longest and most sustained effort, the book is worth attention, though we confess it strikes us as flat and tedious. Years ago, however, in the pages of some *Boys' Magazine* it enthralled us for months, and this is perhaps a not unfair test. Pecuniarily the volume was not successful, but in London a publishing firm were hoaxed, and actually commenced arrangements for republishing the work as a *bonâ fide* history of travel before its real character was discovered—and even then thought fit to persevere.

In 1838, Poe settled in Philadelphia, trusting for existence to the precarious chances of a "free-lance" magazine contributor. For some months he was unsuccessful, and maddened by despair, when his wife and mother were starving, he committed a most serious literary misdemeanour by printing as his own work,

with prefatory thanks to certain gentlemen for scientific assistance, a text-book on Conchology, that was originally written, precisely as republished, by Captain T. Brown, and issued at Glasgow in 1833. Poe actually took out a copyright, but in a second edition his name was omitted and his initials affixed only to the introduction. The fraud was not discovered for many years, and, disgraceful as it was, certainly injured no one but himself.

In a short time he attracted general notice by his articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, then owned by Burton, the comedian; and, in 1839, he was appointed editor, receiving ten dollars per week for two hours' work a day—an arrangement that left him time not only for regular critical contributions to the *Literary Messenger* and the *Literary Examiner*, but for the production of some of his most characteristic tales. Happier now than he had been for years past, for his prospects seemed assured, his work regular, interesting, and appreciated, his fame increasing, he writes to one friend that he "has quite overcome the dangerous besetment," and to another that he is "a model of temperance and other virtues."

In the autumn he collected all his prose stories then penned, for republication in two volumes under the title of "Tales of the Grotesque and the Arabesque"—"a title," says a critic, "remarkable and intentional, for both repulse the human figure, and in most respects the works of Poe are extra or superhuman."

Considering the tales generally—those published after as well as before this period, as now found in the complete American edition—we see that out of a total of

seventy, more than half are based upon the sentiment of horror; twenty-two out of thirty-one in the first volume describing death in some unusual or appalling shape. He delights in employing the fascinations of mystery or terror, in telling the exceptions of human life, in rendering madness logical, in fathoming the impossible, in poising the imponderable. In its love for the eccentric and grotesque, in its triumphs over difficulties and enigmas—the most stupendous or the most puerile—his genius is distinctly American. Every entry into a subject is at once attractive; we feel that something awful is at stake, for his solemnity of manner keeps the reader's mind perpetually on the watch; and, while the shadow of mystery influences our imagination, the closeness of reasoning, the minuteness of detail, compel our common sense to follow. There is probably nothing so well calculated to rivet attention as this tranquil tone, these quiet observations, so thorough as to be almost scientific, when applied to a fact altogether monstrous, to a hypothesis of which no man had even dreamed before. And then his prose has also the unusual merit of form—graceful, highly polished, compact, yet very varied. There is scarcely anything of human feeling in his tales, but a sort of fatalistic despair; no trace of the influences of vice or virtue, no conscience, no remorse, no love, for even in *Ligeia* and *Eleonora* the main idea upon which they hinge is quite other. Human, however, they certainly are, insomuch as they reproduce constantly, incessantly, inevitably, the life that Poe individually led—the life of his dreamful as well as his waking hours, with all the wealth of his imaginations

and aspirations, all the miseries of his despondencies and despairs. His hero, following his own proudest idea, is always the luckless scion of some luckless house of lofty lineage; his accessories always gorgeous; his scenery teems with a splendour and magnificence partly oriental, but partly due to an excited and stimulated imagination, which sought in alcohol what other dreamers found in opium. Borrowing, again, the eloquent words of Baudelaire :—

"The characters of Poe, or rather, *the* character of Poe, the man with sharpened faculties, the man with nerves relaxed, the man whose ardent and patient will bids a defiance to difficulties, whose glance is steadfastly fixed, with the rigidness of a sword, upon objects that increase the more, the more he gazes—this man is Poe himself; and his women, all luminous and sickly, dying of a thousand unknown ills, and speaking with a voice resembling music, are still himself; or, at least, by their strange aspirations, by their knowledge, by their incurable melancholy, they participate strongly in the nature of their creator."

The grotesque tales are certainly the least powerful, but he was not himself inclined to claim merit for one class at the expense of the other. He insisted that they could only be judged as a whole :—

"In writing these tales, one by one, at long intervals, I have kept the book unity always in mind—that is, each has been composed with reference to its effect as part of *a whole*. In this view, one of my chief aims has been the widest diversity of subject, thought, and especially *tone*

and manner of handling. Were *all* my tales now before me in a large volume, and as the composition of another, the merit which would principally arrest my attention would be their wide *diversity and variety.* You will be surprised to hear me say that (omitting one or two of my first efforts) I do not consider any one of my stories *better* than another. There is a vast variety of kinds, and in degree of value, these kinds vary—but each tale is equally good *of its kind.* The loftiest kind is that of the highest imagination—and for this reason only 'Ligeia' may be called my best tale."

For more than a year Poe remained with Burton gaining at this time—for not even the *Tales* were pecuniarily successful—"almost enough money to support life;" but so liable was he still to sudden relapses that the actor was never with confidence able to leave the city. Returning on one occasion after the regular day of publication, he found the number unfinished, and his editor incapable of duty. He left remonstrances to the morrow, prepared the "copy" himself, and issued the magazine, and then to his astonishment received a letter from his assistant, the tone of which may be inferred from Burton's answer:—

"I am sorry you have thought it necessary to send me such a letter. Your troubles have given a morbid tone to your feelings which it is your duty to discourage. I myself have been as severely handled by the world as you can possibly have been, but my sufferings have not tinged my mind with melancholy, nor jaundiced my views of society. You must rouse your energies, and if

care assail you, conquer it. I will gladly overlook the past. I hope you will as easily fulfil your pledges for the future. We shall agree very well, though I cannot permit the magazine to be made a vehicle for that sort of severity which you think is so 'successful with the mob.' I am truly much less anxious about making a monthly 'sensation' than I am upon the point of fairness. You must, my dear sir, get rid of your avowed ill-feelings toward your brother authors. You see I speak plainly: I cannot do otherwise upon such a subject. You say the people love havoc. I think they love justice. . . . . But I wander from my design. I accept your proposition to recommence your interrupted avocations upon the *Maga*. Let us meet as if we had not exchanged letters. Use more exercise, write when feelings prompt, and be assured of my friendship. You will soon regain a healthy activity of mind, and laugh at your past vagaries."

Three months afterwards, Burton again left town, and again found that during his absence not only had the *Gentleman's Magazine* been utterly neglected for a fortnight, but that Poe had prepared the prospectus of a new periodical, making use of confidential office-papers, and the current lists of subscribers for his own scheme. In indignation, Burton spent the evening seeking for his editor, and finding him at last at one of his usual haunts, began—"Mr. Poe, I am astonished: give me my manuscripts, so that I can attend to the duties you have so shamefully neglected, and when you are sober we will settle. . . ." "Who are you," interrupted Poe, "who presume to address me in this manner? Burton, I am—the

editor—of the *Penn Magazine*—and you are—(hiccup)—a fool!"

This, of course, closed his connection with Burton, but his retirement virtually put an end to the periodical, which was merged in Graham's *Casket;* but in November, 1840, the new series received the name of its proprietor, and as *Graham's Magazine* was again entrusted to the editorship of Poe, who, whatever his shortcomings in business life, was widely acknowledged by the public as one of the leading magazine writers of the day. For eighteen months he continued in this post, contributing many of his most trenchant criticisms, and some of his most brilliant tales; attracting, moreover, no little attention by his studies on cypher-writing, and the character of handwriting.

Two of the tales, the "Mystery of Marie Roget"—a minute transcription of the actual murder of a Mary Rogers at New York—and the "Murders of the Rue Morgue," excited universal admiration; and the ingenuity with which he unravelled the mysterious intricacies of the latter, brought his name conspicuously before the law courts of Paris. A writer in the French journal, *La Commerce,* published the story as his own, while one of the staff of *La Quotidienne* furbished it up under a new title for the columns of that paper, whereupon the publisher of *La Commerce* prosecuted the publisher of *La Quotidienne* for stealing his literary wares. Upon the trial, however, it was clearly shewn that each had appropriated Poe's story without the least acknowledgment. In consequence of this, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*

devoted a long article to Poe's tales, and this attracted the attention of Charles Baudelaire to the author. Himself one of the greatest of modern French poets, and with a genius singularly akin to Poe's, Baudelaire made the study of Poe's writings the love-labour of his leisure hours, and produced a translation altogether unrivalled. To his eloquent essays on Poe's life, character, and genius, we have had repeatedly to confess our indebtedness.

In 1842, Graham, like White and Burton, was compelled to seek another editor, and Poe was once more thrown into a condition utterly miserable. One of the dreams of his life was to have a periodical entirely under his own control, and at this time he made strenuous efforts to float a new venture to be called the *Stylus*, but though the publishers acknowledged his abilities as a writer, they were afraid of his infirmities, and for a year and a half his means of existence were wretchedly precarious,—his only success being a prize of one hundred dollars for the "Gold Bug." It was at this period that he was first introduced to Griswold, who had succeeded to Poe's editorship, and it is a fair gauge of his poverty that he was driven to send the following petty request to his new acquaintance:—

"Philadelphia, June 11, 1843.

"DEAR GRISWOLD,—Can you not send me five dollars? I am sick, and Virginia is almost gone. Come and see me. Peterson says you suspect me of a curious anonymous letter. I did not write it, but bring it along with you when you make the visit you promised to Mrs. Clemm.

I will try to fix that matter soon. Could you do anything with my note ?—Yours truly, E. A. P."

It would be useless to deny the fact that Poe's poverty and misery were due, if not to himself, at all events to his infirmities. Willis and Mrs. Osgood both declare that a single glass of wine was sufficient to intoxicate him; Baudelaire urges that to a man so really solitary, so profoundly unfortunate, one who considered modern society as an atrocious paradox—"as principally composed of villains"—the delights of forgetfulness, to be found in the flagon, were not unnatural, that, too, his intoxication was "a mnemonic means, a method of work, a method energetic and fatal, but appropriate to his passionate nature . . . . he could not resist the desire of finding again those visions marvellous or awful, those subtle conceptions which he had met before in a preceding tempest; they were old acquaintances which imperatively attracted him, and to renew his knowledge of them, he took the road most dangerous but most direct, till the works which give us so much pleasure to day, were in reality the cause of his death." Again, with troubles weighing heavily upon him, with misery, and bitterness, and shame, is easy to see how Poe with his peculiar temperament might have imperceptibly drifted towards alcohol as a solace and an antidote—a vain antidote maybe, for he was like that sorry quack, who died with the elixir of life in his pocket. Drink, at all events, gave him what he longed for, the means, though for ever so short a time, of setting the Fates themselves at defiance:—

"Stoic, I am not:
In the terror of my lot
I laugh to think how poor
That pleasure to 'endure!'
What! shade of Zeno! I!—
Endure!—no!—no!—defy!"

Be the diagnosis of the disease what it may, it must for those who loved him—his young wife, his tender mother—have been fairly heart-rending to watch their darling, a man of soft and winning nature, a gentleman of birth and perfect breeding, a writer of brilliant promise and performance, of whom so many things were prophesied—to watch him start each day in vain search of the wretched hack-work that should merely give them bread and life;—to watch his disconsolate return each evening, when spite of all his affection for them, of all his purposes and resolutions, he would steal to the bottle for forgetfulness, or for dreams happier than the present;—to watch him week by week, as he became degraded and besotted, his eloquent face losing all its intelligence and beauty, his flashing eyes growing dull and leaden, his hair sparse and grey, his limbs more and more enervated, his speech full of bitterness and rancour to all humankind save them. "What malady," he cries, in an outburst of despair, "is comparable to alcohol!"

At last life at Baltimore was insupportable, was, indeed, no longer possible, and in the autumn of 1844 he migrated to New York—a step which he should have taken in his early manhood. Now at last he was in a metropolis where there was something like literary

brotherhood, and where society was beginning to be appreciative of artistic worth—and to the choicest circles of this society his reputation as author of "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque" at once gave him the entry, while the charms of his manner and conversation soon made him a universal favourite. His conversation, indeed, was as excellent as his writings. Detesting conventialities his eloquence was essentially poetic, and while on the one hand a vast knowledge, an acquaintance with many tongues, a familiarity with many cities, many countries, made him a powerful teacher, on the other an imagery borrowed from the worlds unseen, with at once all that was most delicately beautiful, all that was gloomiest and grandest, held the hearer enthralled till he himself chose to dissolve the spell, and to demolish his spiritual fancy by some sudden brutal cynicism, or petty vulgar jest. "As he talked," says Griswold, "his voice was modulated with astonishing skill, and his large and invariably expressive eyes looked repose or shot fiery tumult into theirs who listened, while his own face glowed or was changeless in pallor, as his imagination quickened his blood or drew it back frozen to his heart."

Soon after his arrival in New York, Poe published the *Raven*. He did not, like Byron, awake one morning to find himself famous, but on the very afternoon of the day of issue the words rang through the city, and while at the street corners, the ladies' drawing-rooms, and even the exchanges, busy men and women paused in their labours to quote one to another some lines of its mystery,

the poet himself came reeling down Broadway miserably intoxicated. He was, alas! as those who knew him felt the

> " . . . . unhappy master, whom unmerciful Disaster
> Followed fast and followed faster, till his songs one burden bore—
> Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore,
> Of 'Never—nevermore!"

In one of his essays,* Poe professes to disclose the secret genesis of the *Raven*, and to ingeniously prove that "the whole work proceeded step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem." This essay is very interesting, almost unknown here, and is well worth a page of abbreviated quotation. He begins by feeling "the necessity of composing a poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste and be universally appreciated." The first question is that of length. "I hold," he says elsewhere, "that a long poem does not exist"—being at all events "merely a succession of brief ones," and that "the limit of a single sitting, if it may occasionally be overpassed in prose, can never properly be exceeded in a poem." Again, "the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect," a certain degree of duration being, of course, absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all. With this in mind, "I reached at once what I conceived to be the proper length for my intended poem—a length of about one hundred lines." It is in fact one hundred and eight, the eight consisting of two stanzas *afterwards* added. Next came

* *The Philosophy of Composition.*

the effect to be conveyed. "Beauty," he repeatedly insists, "is the sole legitimate province of the poem," and "beauty of whatever kind in its supreme development excites the sensitive soul to tears; melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones." The "length, province, and tone" determined, he desires a "key-note," or pivot, upon which the whole structure might turn. Naturally the *refrain* occurs to him, but he determines to depart from the general rule, and while rigorously preserving the monotone of sound to produce continually novel effects by varying that of thought. For this purpose a single vowel seems the best, and as the refrain forms the close to each stanza, it must necessarily "be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis. . . . . and these considerations inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant." Searching for a word to embody this sound and yet in the fullest possible keeping with the melancholy "tone" the word "Nevermore" is, the very first to present itself. It is difficult, however, to put this protracted and re-iterated expression continuously and monotonously in the mouth of a reasoning being, and he selects first a parrot, but afterwards a raven —bird of ill-omen—as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended tone. Returning again to the subject he argues that death, the most melancholy of all topics, is most poetical when allied to beauty; the death, therefore, of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world; and the lips best suited for such topic are those of

a bereaved lover. Combining now the two ideas, of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a raven continuously repeating the word "nevermore," he sees that to vary the application duly he should make the first query to which the raven should reply commonplace, the second less so, the third still less, and so on till the lover, moved from his *nonchalance* is at last "excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture." He now selects the form of versification, the "first object being as usual originality," and this originality he obtains by choosing lines which taken individually have been used before, but which have never previously been combined into stanzas. "The rhythm," he pedantically tells us, "is trochaic, the metre octameter acatalectic, alternating with heptameter catalectic, repeated in the refrain of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrameter catalectic. (!) At this stage, then, the poet first puts pen to the paper in the composition of the last stanza—the culminating point:—

> "'Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn,
> It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
> Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore!'
> Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore.'"

Nothing now was left but to bring the raven and the lover together, and though the woods or fields might seem the most natural, he feels that *a close circumspection of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated

incident, and determines to place the lover in a chamber rendered sacred by bygone memories. With all the materials well in hand, nothing, according to Poe, was easier than to produce a masterpiece "universally appreciable."

But, as Hannay well says, all these mechanical principles "surely presuppose the pure creative genius necessary to the conception." Give the data as here stated in a university examination paper and see what a dozen first-class men will make of them. This *Philosophy of Composition* is, indeed, too thoroughly ingenious, and knowing that Poe was sometimes carried away by his pride in paradox—and here he distinctly wishes to controvert the idea that poetry is "composed by a species of fine frenzy, an ecstatic intuition"—it is difficult to avoid thinking that in part, at all events, the poem suggested the method, rather than the method the poem. He had, too, in regard to his works the same delight we have noticed in relation to his conversation—of bringing the reader back again, and suddenly, to earth, and this cynicism induced many contemporary writers to share opinions that even the kindly critic, Russell Lowell, felt justified in penning :—

> "Then comes Poe with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
> Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge,
> Who talks like a book of iambs and pentameters,
> In a way to make people of common sense damn metres,
> Who has written some things quite the best of their kind,
> But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind." *

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* *Fable for Critics.*

Be the genesis of the poem what it may, the result to all time will be the same. In England it was quoted as eagerly and as widely as in the States; and here it introduced the author to the notice of our own singers. Miss Barrett (to whom afterwards as Mrs. Browning he dedicated all his poems) wrote enthusiastically, giving other authority than her own—"Our great poet, Mr. Browning, was struck much by the rhythm of that poem."

To the fame thus suddenly acquired Poe soon added by the publication of his *Mesmeric Revelation*, followed by the *Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*. These pieces, even Griswold, tardy as he is of eulogy, says, "were reprinted throughout the literary and philosophical world in nearly all languages, causing everywhere sharp and curious speculation, and, where readers could be persuaded that they were false, challenging a reluctant but genuine admiration."

It might be thought that a writer so distinguished in two vastly different lines would have had the ball of Fortune at his feet, and indeed Poe had not been long in New York before he was engaged by Willis and General Morris as critic and assistant editor of the *Mirror;* but before this it is evident that he must have suffered, and severely, from one of his miserable attacks, for Willis graphically describes their early connection together:—

"Our first knowledge of Mr. Poe's removal to this city was by a call which we received from a lady, who introduced herself to us as the mother of his wife. She was in search of employment for him; and she excused her errand by mentioning that he was ill, that her daughter

was a confirmed invalid, and that their circumstances were such as compelled her taking it upon herself. The countenance of this lady, made beautiful and saintly with an evidently complete giving up of her life to privation and sorrowful tenderness, her gentle and mournful voice urging its plea, her long-forgotten but habitually and unconsciously refined manners, and her appealing and yet appreciative mention of the claims and abilities of her son, disclosed at once the presence of one of those angels upon earth that women in adversity can be. It was a hard fate that she was watching over. Mr. Poe wrote with fastidious difficulty, and in a style too much above the popular level to be well paid. He was always in pecuniary difficulty, and with his sick wife, frequently in want of the merest necessaries of life. Winter after winter, for years, the most touching sight to us, in this whole city, has been that tireless minister to genius, thinly and insufficiently clad, going from office to office with a poem, or an article on some literary subject, to sell—sometimes simply pleading in a broken voice that he was ill, and begging for him—mentioning nothing but that 'he was ill,' whatever might be the reason for his writing nothing—and never, amid all her tears and recitals of distress, suffering one syllable to escape her lips that could convey a doubt of him, or a complaint, or a lessening of pride in his genius and good intentions."

Yet Willis bears testimony stronger than any now existing, that Poe was not the utterly helpless and degraded drunkard that so many American biographers have wished to depict him:—

"Some four or five years since, when editing a daily paper in this city, Mr. Poe was employed by us for several months as critic and sub-editor. This was our first personal acquaintance with him. He resided with his wife and mother at Fordham, a few miles out of town, but was at his desk in the office from nine in the morning till the evening paper went to press. With the highest admiration for his genius, and a willingness to let it atone for more than ordinary irregularity, we were led by common report to expect a very capricious attention to his duties, and occasionally a scene of violence and difficulty. Time went on, however, and he was invariably punctual and industrious. With his pale beautiful, and intellectual face, as a reminder of what genius was in him, it was impossible, of course, not to treat him always with deferential courtesy. . . . It was by rumour only, up to the day of his death, that we knew of any other development of manner or character. We heard from one who knew him well (what should be stated in all mention of his lamentable irregularities), that with a *single glass* of wine his whole nature was reversed, and though none of the usual signs of intoxication were visible, his *will* was palpably insane . . . . which puts it very nearly upon the ground of a temporary and irresponsible insanity."

An assured income now allowed the unwonted luxury of a quiet, peaceful home, at a pretty little cottage at Fordham, where, as he himself says, he could enjoy "the four elementary conditions of happiness—life in the open air, the love of a woman, forgetfulness of all ambition, and

the creation of a new ideal of beauty." As a pendant to Willis's account of the poet's business life we cannot refrain from quoting Mrs. Osgood's touching and graceful sketch of his domestic happiness during this rare interval :—

"It was in his own simple yet poetical home that to me the character of Edgar Poe appeared in its most beautiful light. Playful, affectionate, witty, alternately docile and wayward as a petted child—for his young, gentle, and idolized wife, and for all who came, he had, even in the midst of his most harassing literary duties, a kind word, a pleasant smile, a graceful and courteous attention. At his desk, beneath the romantic picture of his loved and lost Lenore, he would sit, hour after hour, patient, assiduous, and uncomplaining, tracing in an exquisitely clear chirography and with almost superhuman swiftness, the lightning thoughts—the 'rare and radiant' fancies as they flashed through his wonderful and ever-wakeful brain. I recollect one morning, towards the close of his residence in this city, when he seemed unusually gay and light-hearted. Virginia, his sweet wife, had written me a pressing invitation to come to them; and I, who never could resist her affectionate summons, and who enjoyed his society far more in his own home than elsewhere, hastened to *Amity Street*. I found him just completing his series of papers, entitled 'The Literati of New York.' 'See,' said he, displaying, in laughing triumph, several little rolls of narrow paper (he always wrote thus for the press), 'I am going to show you, by the difference of length in these, the different degrees of estimation in

which I hold all you literary people. In each of these, one of you is rolled up and fully discussed. Come, Virginia, help me!' And one by one they unfolded them. At last they came to one which seemed interminable. Virginia laughingly ran to one corner of the room with one end, and her husband to the opposite with the other. 'And whose lengthened sweetness long drawn out is that?' said I. 'Hear her!' he cried, 'just as if her little vain heart didn't tell her it's herself!' . . .

"During that year, while travelling for my health, I maintained a correspondence with Mr. Poe, in accordance with the earnest entreaties of his wife, who imagined that my influence over him had a restraining and beneficial effect. It *had*, as far as this—that having solemnly promised me to give up the use of stimulants, he so firmly respected his promise and me, as never once, during our whole acquaintanceship, to appear in my presence when in the slightest degree affected by them Of the charming love and confidence that existed between his wife and himself, always delightfully apparent to me, in spite of the many little poetical episodes, in which the impassioned romance of his temperament impelled him to indulge; of this I cannot speak too earnestly, too warmly. I believe she was the only woman whom he ever truly loved."

He left Willis to take the lead in the *Broadway Journal*, in which, in February, 1845, he became possessed of a third interest. In March he appeared before the public for the first time with a lecture upon the "Poets of America," and in the autumn accepted an

invitation to read an original poem before the Boston Lyceum. At the time he was ill, over-worked, full of worry, and in despair, he wrote to Mrs. Osgood :—"You compose with such astonishing facility that you can easily furnish me, quite soon enough, a poem that shall be equal to my reputation. For the love of God I beseech you to help me in this extremity." The lady promised compliance, but failed to finish her work in time. Poe's design was certainly cool, but his execution was cooler, for he gravely recited "Al Araaf," the weakest and most puerile of his juvenile efforts. The Bostonians, at first enraptured with the piece, were disgusted when they discovered the hoax. A very wordy war ensued, and Poe replied in sarcastic triumph :—"The poem they say is bad. We admit it. We insisted upon this point in our prefatory remarks, and we insist upon it now, over and over again. It is bad—it is wretched—and what then? We wrote it at ten years of age—had it been worth even a pumpkin-pie undoubtedly we should not have delivered it to them." He was asked no more to Boston.

In October the *Broadway Journal* passed entirely into his hands, and at last he possessed what he so often longed for—the absolute control of a periodical. This magazine unfortunately was in anything but a favourable condition, and his own pecuniary means were, as usual, almost *nil*. In this strait he wrote round to his friends, and Griswold, in reply to the following note, sent the trifle required, but expressed doubts as to success :—

"My dear Griswold,—*Will* you aid me at a pinch—at one of the greatest pinches conceivable? If you will, I will be indebted to you for life. After a prodigious deal of manœuvring, I have succeeded in getting the *Broadway Journal* entirely within my own control. It will be a fortune to me if I can hold it—and I can do it easily with a very trifling aid from my friends. May I count you as one? Lend me $50, and you shall never have cause to regret it.—Yours truly, Edgar A. Poe."

And the doubts were justified, for the first use to which he put the magazine was to attack his enemies at Boston; among these he somewhat wantonly included Professor Longfellow, whom he accused of gross plagiarism.* The public did not greatly care for these private quarrels, and after a few months' flickering existence, the *Broadway*, in January, 1846, went the way of all impecunious periodicals.

* This accusation was of old date in relation to both German and American writers. On Poe's part the quarrel was very bitter. There was a marked similarity between Poe's "Haunted Palace" and Longfellow's "Beleaguered City;" the former was undoubtedly first published, but Longfellow convinced his friends that the "Beleaguered City" had been in private circulation even previously. After his unfortunate rival's death, Longfellow, forgetful of much, at a time when all literary America seems to have been grubbing up evil reports, wrote:—"I never knew him personally, but have always entertained a high appreciation of his powers as a prose-writer and a poet. His prose is remarkably vigorous, direct and yet affluent; and his verse has a particular charm of melody, an atmosphere of true poetry about it, which is very winning. The harshness of his criticism I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinable sense of wrong."

Thrown again upon his wits for sustenance, he commenced a series of brilliant articles upon the "Literati of New York," in the *Lady's Book*. Of all his critical writings these are probably the best. "Unerring," says Willis, "in his analysis of dictum, metres, and plots, he seemed wanting in the faculty of perceiving the profounder ethics of art. His criticisms are, however, distinguished for scientific precision and coherence of logic. They have the exactness, and, at the same time, the coldness of mathematical demonstrations." Personally and after some study of the subject, we have no very high opinion of Poe's critical method, full though it be of strange conceits and astonishing innovations; but whatever else they may be, they are certainly not "cold:"—he writes in this like Jeffrey or Johnson or Macaulay, not like Sainte-Beuve; and his "reviewals," as Yankees term them, are now chiefly valuable for the thorough personality they exhibit, and as records, flushed and glowing still, of zealous friendship or eager hate. Not for one moment does the critic cease to be Edgar Allan Poe; never trying his author by broad and general rules, never even by the narrower standard of the author's own talents and powers, but—as on that terrible bed wherein the Syracusan tyrant slept—all luckless victims must alike to be made, by hewing off or drawing out, to fit one fanciful and individual measure.

The sarcastic personality, the outspoken boldness of the sketches, carried some of the numbers through three editions, but led to their premature conclusion, for among the many quarrels they instituted, a Dr. English resented

Poe's remarks by publicly describing his life and character, alleging, of course falsely, that he had "on several occasions inflicted personal chastisement" upon the critic. The proprietor of the *Lady's Book* declined to print *in extenso* Poe's answer to these charges, and his irate contributor brought an action against English, and issued the communication elsewhere. Among much else he says:—

"The errors and frailties which I deplore, it cannot at least be asserted that I have been the coward to deny. Never, even, have I made attempt at *extenuating* a weakness which is (or, by the blessing of God, *was*) a calamity, although those who did not know me intimately had little reason to regard it otherwise than as a crime, For, indeed, had my pride, or that of my family, permitted, there was much—very much—there was everything—to be offered in extenuation."

Misery and want of employment again drove him to the solace of the bottle, and in the autumn he and his wife were in a state of destitution beyond even the worst days of their youth. Living at Fordham, they were miles away from those who knew them; his wife lay on her death-bed, and he, too, was grievously ill. At last the newspapers drew the attention of the public to the pitiable condition of the poet's home, and some good souls, chiefly women, hastened to relieve him. Immediately Poe heard of it, which was on the last day of 1846, with a not unnatural pride, he disowned any connection with this appeal, even to publicly disclaiming any necessity for it:—

"That my wife is ill, then, is true; and you may imagine with what feelings I add that this illness, hopeless from the first, has been heightened and precipitated by her reception, at two different periods, of anonymous letters—one enclosing the paragraph now in question; the other, those published calumnies of Messrs. ——, for which I yet hope to find redress in a court of justice.

"That, as the inevitable consequence of so long an illness, I have been in want of money, it would be folly in me to deny—but that I have ever materially suffered from privation, beyond the extent of my capacity for suffering, is not altogether true. That I am 'without friends' is a gross calumny, which I am sure *you* never could have believed, and which a thousand noble-hearted men would have good right never to forgive me for permitting to pass unnoticed and undenied.

"I am getting better, and may add—if it be any comfort to my enemies—that I have little fear of getting worse. The truth is, I have a great deal to do; and I have made up my mind not to die till it is done."

The words had, however, been wrung from him in the bitterness of shame, for, in a short time, he writes again to one of those ladies who had lent their assistance:—

"I could not help fearing that should you see my letter to Mr. Willis—in which a natural pride, which I feel you could not blame, impelled me to shrink from public charity, *even at the cost of truth, in denying those necessities which were but too real*—I could not help fearing that, should you see this letter, you would yourself feel pained at having caused me pain—at having been the

means of giving further publicity to an unfounded report —at all events to the report of a wretchedness which I had thought it prudent (since the world regards wretchedness as a crime) so publicly to disavow."

For a few weeks they lived or starved upon the charity of strangers in such fearful plight that Mrs. Poe had to lie on a straw bed "wrapped in her husband's great-coat, with a large cat in her bosom;" and these her "only means of warmth except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet;" and then the patient, suffering wife, who, though long an invalid, had been the very mainstay of his struggles, died in the midst of their wretchedness, leaving her husband to miserably mourn—

> "For her, the fair and debonair, that now so lowly lies,
> The light upon her yellow hair, but not within her eyes—
> The light still there, upon her hair—the death upon her eyes."

On her death-bed, he swore to her, again and again, that never would he wed another woman, and then he returned to the gloomy solitude of the hateful days before his marriage, when he had never a hope or desire in the world. She left no children, and nothing now but memories remained.

For a whole twelvemonth he shut himself up in seclusion, seeing no one but Mrs. Clemm, who, as he himself says, was more than a mother. Very gentle and kind and tender she was; and as even his literary hopes had died out, she would wheedle him into composition, and then trudge painfully through the journal offices of

New York to sell here an article, or there a poem. As Willis says:—

"She continued his ministering angel—living with him—caring for him—guarding him against exposure; and, when he was carried away by temptation, amid grief and loneliness of feelings unreplied to, and awoke from his self-abandonment prostrated in destitution and suffering, *begging* for him still. If woman's devotion, born with a first love, and fed with human passion, hallow its object, as it is allowed to do, what does not a devotion like this—pure, disinterested, and holy as the watch of an invisible spirit—say for him who inspired it?"

It was at this period that he penned the following beautiful sonnet, glowing with the tenderest love:—

"TO MY MOTHER.

"Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,
The angels, whispering to one another,
Can find, among their burning terms of love,
None so devotional as that of 'mother,'
Therefore by that dear name I long have called you—
You who are more than mother unto me,
And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you,
In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
My mother—my own mother—who died early,
Was but the mother of myself; but you
Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
By that infinity with which my wife
Was dearer to my soul than its own soul life."

Time, as it passed, softened something of his sorrow. He was a man too full of latent energy to rest for ever

paralyzed by misfortune, and in the January of 1848, we find that his early dream of establishing a new magazine —"when he should feel thoroughly at home"—was again coming uppermost. For eight weary years he had laboured with this one idea constantly in view, but had never once possessed the few hundred dollars that should give him the sorriest start. He now hit upon a plan involving nothing else but labour, and, commoner in America than England, not unlikely to be successful:—

"Fordham, January 22, 1848.

"MY DEAR MR. WILLIS,—I am about to make an effort at re-establishing myself in the literary world, and *feel* that I may depend upon your aid.

"My general aim is to start a Magazine, to be called '*The Stylus;*' but it would be useless to me, even when established, if not entirely out of the control of a publisher. I mean, therefore, to get up a Journal which shall be *my own*, at all points. With this end in view, I must get a list of, at least, five hundred subscribers to begin with:—nearly two hundred I have already. I propose, however, to go South and West, among my personal and literary friends—old college and West Point acquaintances—and see what I can do. In order to get the means of taking the first step, I propose to lecture at the Society Library, on Thursday, the 3rd of February—and, that there may be no cause of *squabbling*, my subject shall *not be literary* at all. I have chosen a broad text—'The Universe.'

"Having thus given you *the facts* of the case, I leave

all the rest to the suggestions of your own tact and generosity. Gratefully—*most* gratefully—

"Your friend always, EDGAR A. POE."

The lecture was so far successful as to be attended by "an eminently intellectual auditory," but the subject was too broad, too lofty, too extensive, to attract popularity; and even when published in book-form, as "Eureka, a prose-poem," the volume, though hailed as Poe's most ambitious effort, altogether failed to find readers.

"Eureka" is dedicated in the preface:—

"To the few who love me and whom I love; to those who feel rather than to those who think; to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities—I offer this book of truths, not in the character of Truth-Teller, but for the beauty that abounds in its truth: constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an Art-Product alone:—let us say as a Romance; or, if it be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem."

In Eureka, Poe's subtlest and highest powers are to be found in their most perfect development. At the moment, at all events, he was thoroughly persuaded that all his arguments had legitimate bases and were true; but, judging the work only as an effort of ingenuity and logic, the book is almost unique, and is well worth consideration. It proves that Poe, though in much agreeing with the most beautiful of the old Brahminical tenets, has, like Novalis, a right to stand in the front rank of modern Pantheists.*

* For an admirable study on Poe's philosophy, see the *North American Review*, volume eighty-three, to which we are greatly indebted as elucidating the many mysteries of *Eureka*.

The central idea of Poe's general philosophy consisted in a belief that a universal ether fills all space, permeates all matter, and that this ether is in essence what is commonly understood by the term *spirit*, and is manifested in those subtle and inexplicable principles such as magnetism, light, vitality, consciousness, and thought; and that, to serve the purposes of this sentient ether—the only Godhead which he acknowledged—matter was created.

Now, in *Eureka*, he argues that this Divine Unity or Godhead, has exerted but one creative volition, when in the beginning of all things he willed matter into existence from nihility, and that this original matter was in the simplest form, a single, unrelated particle. Other and less energetic volitions divide this original uniform particle, producing separation, diffusion, and multiplicity; the divided matter being irradiated from a circle, not as rays, but in parallel strata. Unity, however, being the normal state, there is an inherent tendency in each atom to return to unity, and to counteract this, an antagonistic force, *heterogeneity*, is introduced. This essence, manifested as electricity, he holds however in overmuch awe to in any way discuss. But as unity is normal, and diffusion abnormal, he argues that the normal must prove the stronger, and that matter will return to that nihility from whence it came, and from which a new cosmogony may be evoked by a new volition:—

"A novel universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart divine. And this heart what is it? It is our own. In

man the sense and general identity will be gradually merged in the general consciousness . . . . the general sum of the separate sensations of created things is precisely the amount of happiness which appertains by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within himself."

"Eureka," as book or lecture, brought in very little money, and then he undertook a work which probably brought in less—the publication of a collected edition of his poems, "chiefly with a view to their redemption from the many improvements to which they have been subjected while going at random the rounds of the press. "With me," he writes, "poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion, and the passions should be held in reverence; they must not, they cannot, at will, be excited, with an eye to the paltry compensations, or the more paltry commendations of mankind." "He believes," says Baudelaire, "true poet that he was, that the aim of poetry is of the same nature as its principle—that it ought never to have in view anything but itself." Elsewhere Poe himself tells us—"the origin of Poetry lies in a thirst for wilder beauty than earth supplies—that poetry itself is the imperfect effort to quench this immortal thirst by novel combinations of beautiful forms (collocations of forms) physical and spiritual, and that this thirst when even partially allayed—this sentiment when even feebly meeting response—produces emotions to which all other human emotions are vapid and insignificant. . . . and yet there are men who would mingle with the august theme the merest questions of expediency—the cant topics of the day—the doggrel æsthetics of the time—

who would trammel the soul in its flight to an ideal Helusion by the quirks and quibbles of chopped logic." *

These extracts show sufficiently for our space what Poe's idea of poetry really was, and the execution of his idea in his own poems has been previously discussed. "He wrote," says Willis grimly, "in a style too much above the popular level to be well paid." Had he received in his lifetime but one-tenth of what ten publishers have since netted from his works, his days would have been more assured. As it was "events not to be controlled" made poetry the luxury of his leisure, and incessantly drove him to the veriest hack-work that would bring in immediate cash. By this time, however, he had quarrelled with the conductors of the leading periodicals, and, though with a reputation perhaps higher than that of any other in New York, he writes to a friend in bitterness of heart upon the wretched uncertainty of a literary career :—

"I have represented —— to you as merely an ambitious simpleton, anxious to get into society with the reputation of conducting a magazine, which somebody behind the curtain always prevents him from quite damning with his stupidity ; he is a knave and a beast. I cannot write any more for the Milliner's Book, where T——n prints his feeble and *very* quietly made dilutions of other people's reviews ; and you know that —— can afford to pay but little, though I am glad to do anything for a a good fellow like ——. In this emergency I sell articles to the vulgar and trashy —— — — ——, for $5 apiece.

* Essay on R. H. Horne's "Orion."

I enclose my last, cut out, lest you should see by my sending the paper in what company I am forced to appear."

Another letter, of about the same date, to Willis is scarcely less pitiful:—

"My dear Willis,—The poem which I enclose, and which I am so vain as to hope you will like, in some respects, has been just published in a paper for which sheer necessity compels me to write now and then. It pays well as times go—but unquestionably it ought to pay ten prices; for whatever I send it I feel I am consigning to the tomb of Capulets. The verses accompanying this, may I beg you to take out of the tomb, and bring them to light in the 'Home Journal?' If you can oblige me so far as to copy them, I do not think it necessary to say 'From the ———, — that would be too bad: —and, perhaps, 'From a late ——— paper,' would do.

"I have not forgotten how a 'good word in season' from you made 'The Raven,' and made 'Ulalume,' (which, by-the-way, people have done me the honour of attributing to you)—therefore I *would* ask you (if I dared) to say something of these lines—if they please you."

In the very midst of this despairing misery there came to him another beam of hope. Years ago, at Boston, on the very night after he had read that luckless poem, "Al Araaf," he had strolled restlessly through the city, and through a garden gate he had seen a lady whose beauty made a deep and lasting impression, and this incident has given rise to one of his most exalted poems:—

"I saw thee once—once only—years ago;
I must not say *how* many—but *not* many.
It was a July midnight; and from out
A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul, soaring,
Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven,
There fell a silvery-silken veil of light,
With quietude, and sultriness, and slumber,
Upon the upturn'd faces of a thousand
Roses that grew in an enchanted garden,
Where no wind dared to stir, unless on tiptoe—
Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
That gave out, in return for the love-light,
Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death—
Fell on the upturn'd faces of these roses
That smiled and died in this parterre, enchanted
By thee, and by the poetry of thy presence.

"Was it not Fate, that, on this July midnight—
Was it not Fate, (whose name is also Sorrow)
That bade me pause before that garden-gate,
To breathe the incense of those slumbering roses?
No footstep stirred! the hated world all slept,
Save only thee and me. (Oh, Heaven! oh, God!
How my heart beats in coupling those two words!)
Save only thee and me. I paused—I looked—
And in an instant all things disappeared.

All—all expired save thee—save less than thou:
Save only the divine light in thine eyes—
Save but the soul in thine uplifted eyes.
I saw but them—but they were the world to me.
I saw but them—saw only them for hours—
Saw only them until the moon went down.
What wild heart-histories seem'd to lie enwritten
Upon those crystalline, celestial spheres!
How dark a woe! yet how sublime a hope!
How silently serene a sea of pride!
How daring an ambition! yet how deep—
How fathomless a capacity for love!

"*Only thine eyes remained.*
They *would not* go—they never yet have gone.
Lighting my lonely pathway home that night,
They have not left me (as my hopes have) since.
They follow me—they lead me through the years—
They are my ministers—yet I their slave.
Their office is to illumine and enkindle—
My duty, *to be saved* by their bright light,
And purified in their electric fire,
And sanctified in their elysian fire."

At the time this was merely what Mrs. Osgood terms one of "the many little poetical episodes in which the impassioned romance of his temperament compelled him to indulge;" but, by a strange fate, he was, after his wife's death, thrown into contact with this lady whom he now discovered to be one of the wealthiest and most brilliant, as well as one of the loveliest, women in New England; and, moreover, an intense admirer of his genius. In the time of his trouble her womanly presence was most solacing; they became secretly engaged; his whole future seemed assured as a life of artistic luxury to be devoted to love and poetry. Such a happiness, however, would scarcely have fitted duly into the story of his stormy career.

The news, of course, was noised abroad, and one morning in New York he was greeted with the congratulations of a friend. Poe started—"It is a mistake. I am not going to be married!" And then, again himself, he interrupted her gossiping, "Why, Mr. Poe, I understand the banns have been published"—with "I cannot help what you have heard, my dear madam; but mark me, I shall not marry her!"

From the lips of another the very mention of his marriage brought him back suddenly to the thoughts of that miserable death-bed, when he had tried to soothe his dying wife's last moments with promises of eternal faithfulness. "I shall not marry, I may not marry," went surging through his brain, as a chorus, all day long, deadening every other thought, till, scarcely himself and irresistibly urged forward, he took the train to the town where his mistress lived, with no idea in him but of how best to break the engagement. Here, whether by chance or design, he adopted the very means which, in a drama popular in England and Germany, David Garrick is said to have employed. After walking in his cowardice for hours in the streets outside, he reeled into the lady's drawing-room—drunk! The disillusion was brutal but effective—almost as cruel to himself as the lady, for he could not now dare to be seen in New York.

Accordingly, in August, 1849, he fled away to Virginia. Halting at Philadelphia, he met many of his own boon companions, and, eager for oblivion at any price, he threw himself in with them, and was for days utterly abandoned to his worst cravings—drinking and making others drink till his scanty hoard was all exhausted. Those whom he had treated, however, supplied the wherewithal for a ticket to Richmond, and, once arrived, longing for a new life, but clutching at the veriest straw, he joined a temperance society!

Here for two months he clave to his pledge; and, reverting again to his old plan of lecturing, and so obtaining money enough to start the *Stylus*, he "starred" through the principal towns of Virginia.

Everywhere the people welcomed with pride the man who had lived amongst them so poor, so forlorn, so young, and whose fame, but not misfortunes, had since been the theme of the country side. Overjoyed with this reception, Poe wrote to his friends that he had determined to end his days among the scenes endeared by the romances and realities of childhood.

It was, however, first necessary that he should return for a little while to New York; and on the 4th October, though suffering from weakness and shiverings he started. He reached Baltimore at six o'clock in the evening, and, still far from well, he stopped there for an hour or two. Time after time, he had gone back to the city in his troublous days, as one might go back to an unkindly home—now he thought he would see it once again when fortune was all smiling.

He strolled through the old streets, each one full of poignant memories; he met old faces, old friends; and as they talked the old times seemed to come back again—and he laughed with them and joked with them as they curiously regarded him as a famous man; and he felt his heart touched as they told him how this one of their set was married, and that one dead—till his vows were all forgotten, and the night was ended, like the nights of years ago, in the well-remembered corner of some rollicking old tavern—and then with jovial shouts and good wishes the comrades clasped hands and started for home.

Next morning, in the pale shadows of the early day, some policeman stumbled across a corpse lying by the roadside—a corpse? no! merely the body of a drunken

man, but "marked already with the royal stamp of death." They bore it to the hospital—no papers in its pockets, no name—"a drunkard suffering from *delirium tremens*," said the students.

For two days longer Edgar Allan Poe lived on, unconscious of anything but the terrible phantasms that thronged his brain, and then on the 7th October, 1849, he died in the common ward of the hospital of his birthplace—unknown, unwept—

> "And the fever called living
> Was over at last!"

What stale moral verbosities shall we tag on to this pitiful life-story. Nay! if Poe sinned he suffered—suffered so bitterly that even the worst of Philistines—your Yankee Philistine—might have thought the tale sufficed. And yet what raising of pious hands was there; what howls of virtuous indignation before even the body was committed to the grave!—and after! "Is there no law in America," cries Baudelaire, "to keep our dogs from the grave-yards?" One poor soul was heart-broken, and her single, disjointed letter is better testimony than the shoals of gushing articles for which the vampires of the press scrambled to claim payment:—

"I have this morning heard of the death of my darling Eddie. . . . . Can you give me any circumstances or particulars. . . . . Oh! do not desert your poor friend in this bitter affliction. . . . . Ask Mr. —— to come, as I must deliver a message to him from my poor Eddie. . . . . I need not ask you to notice his death

and to speak well of him. I know you will. But say what an affectionate son he was to me, his poor desolate mother." . . . .

APPENDIX.

POE'S first volume of *Poems* was published by Hatch and Dunning at Baltimore, in the year 1829, and is now one of the rarest American books.

When he collected his poems he professed to reprint these *Youthful Poems* verbatim, but some of the more important pieces had undergone such a revision as to be entirely different.

The "Dream within a Dream," now included among the later poems, appeared originally in this volume, but, with the exception of ten lines printed in italics, this first draft will be new to the reader.

"TO———

"Should my early life seem
(As well it might) a dream—
Yet I build no faith upon
The King Napoleon—
I look not up afar
For my destiny in a star.

"In parting from you now,
This much I will avow—
There are beings, and have been,
Whom my spirit had not seen;
Had I let them pass me by
With a dreaming eye—

If my peace hath fled away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?

.

"*I am standing 'mid the roar*
Of a weather-beaten shore,
And I hold within my hand
Some particles of sand.
How few! and how they creep
Thro' my fingers to the deep!
My early hopes? no, they
Went gloriously away
Like lightning from the sky.
Yet once—and so will I.

"So young! Ah! no, not now—
Thou had'st not seen my brow;
But they tell thee I am proud—
They lie—they lie aloud—
My bosom beats with shame
At the paltriness of name,
With which they dare combine
A feeling such as mine—
Nor Stoic? I am not:
In the terror of my lot
I laugh to think how poor
That pleasure "to endure!"
What! shade of Zeno!—I!—
Endure!—no—no—defy."

A second edition, quite as scarce now as the first, was issued at New York in 1831, and from it we extract the original drafts of two poems. "The Valley Nis," however, has nothing but the main idea in common with "The Valley of Unrest," and is much longer.

"THE VALLEY NIS.

"Far away—far away—
Far away—as far at least
Lies that valley as the day
Down within the golden east—
All things lovely—are not they
Far away—far away?

"It is called the valley Nis,
And a Syriac tale there is
Thereabouts, which Time hath said
Shall not be interpreted.
Something about Satan's dart—
Something about angels' wings—
Much about a broken heart—
All about unhappy things;
But "the valley Nis" at best
Means the valley of unrest.

"Once it smiled a silent dell,
Where the people did not dwell,
Having gone into the wars—
And the sly, mysterious stars,
With a visage full of meaning,
O'er the unguarded flowers were leaning,
Or the sun-ray dipped all red
Thro' the tulip overhead,
Then grew paler as it fell
On the quiet asphodel.

"Now the unhappy shall confess
Nothing there is motionless:
Helen, like thy human eye,
There the uneasy violets lie;
There the reedy grass doth wave
O'er the old forgotten grave.
One by one from the tree top,
There the eternal dews do drop;

There the vague and dreamy trees
Do roll like stars in northern breeze
Around the stormy Hebrides;
There the gorgeous clouds do fly,
Rustling everlastingly,
Through the terror-stricken sky,
Rolling like a waterfall
O'er the horizon's fiery wall;
There the moon doth shine by night
With a most unsteady light;
There the sun doth rest by day
'Over the hills and far away.'"

More curious still, as showing the germ of a much longer and more carefully finished poem, is the first draft of Lenore.

"A PÆAN.

"How shall the solemn rite be read?
The solemn song be sung?
The requiem for the loveliest dead
That ever died so young?

"Her friends are gazing on her,
And on her gaudy bier,
And weep—oh! to dishonour
Dead beauty with a tear.

"They loved her for her wealth—
And they hated her for her pride—
But she grew in feeble health,
And they *love* her that she died.

"They tell me (while they speak
Of her 'costly broidered pall')
That my voice is growing weak—
That I should not sing at all—

"Or that my tone should be
Tun'd to such solemn song
So mournfully—mournfully,
That the dead may feel no wrong.

"But she is gone above,
With young Hope at her side,
And I am drunk with love
Of the dead who is my bride.

"Of the dead—dead who lies
All perfum'd there,
With the death upon her eyes
And the light upon her hair.

"Thus on the coffin loud and long
I strike—the murmur sent
Through the grey chamber to my song
Shall be the accompaniment.

"Thou died'st in thy life's June—
But thou didst not die too fair:
Thou didst not die too soon,
Nor with too calm an air.

"From more than fiends on earth
Thy life and love are riven,
To join the untainted mirth
Of more than thrones in heaven.

"Therefore, to thee this night
I will no requiem raise,
But waft thee on thy flight,
With a Pæan of old days."

The following first draft, differing considerably from the later lines to "One in Paradise," at one time obtained a second circulation, and was in America widely attributed to Mr. Tennyson; and a correspondent in our

Spectator for 1st January, 1853, accused the Poet Laureate of plagiarism, to which Mr. Tennyson in a succeeding number replied :—"I am not the author of the lines which he attributes to me; and I have no doubt that both the poems quoted are by the same author, Edgar Allan Poe."

"Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine,
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed around about with flowers,
And the flowers they all were mine.

"But the dream it could not last,
And the star of life did rise
Only to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries
Onward! while o'er the Past
My spirit, hovering, flies.

"Like the murmur of the solemn sea
To sands on the sea-shore,
A voice is whispering unto me,
'The day is past,' and never more
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar.

"And all mine hours are trances,
And all my nights are dreams
Of where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams,
In the maze of flashing dances,
By the slow Idalian streams."

Among the many charges of plagiarism brought up against Poe after his death, there was one crowning piece

of absurdity, which actually obtained considerable credence. Some wretched wag declared that *The Raven*, refrain and all, was merely a translation from the Arabic, and supported his assertion by publishing what he termed a prose translation of the original, but which actually was a prose transcription of Poe's poem, with the rhymes clumsily altered.

VI.
ANDRÉ CHÉNIER.

ANDRÉ CHÉNIER.

THE biography of André Chénier contains the parallel stories of the two distinct and strangely dissimilar lives of a poet and of a political martyr—the two never to be confounded or confused, yet, when by death they were finally merged into one completed history, each seeming the fitting complement to the other. As a poet he lived in a cherished retirement, with his friends, his books, his love-longings, and his unuttered hopes, consecrating the days and nights to his writings, and to an intense study which should fit him to be worthy of his art; and yet so adverse was he to the petty jealousies and contests of a literary career, so far removed from the promptings of vanity, so utterly careless of contemporary applause, that he chose to leave his poems unpublished, and, save to a few dear friends, unknown. When, however, the first signals of the great Revolution quickened the pulse and fired the blood of all who were eagerest, most generous, most hopeful, most impassioned in France, André Chénier, leaving the solitude which had to him become a second nature, threw himself into the vortex of political life with a reckless daring that almost savoured of temerity. There were gross abuses to be abolished;

crying evils to be hunted down; poor stricken wretches to be set again in God's free air; centuries upon centuries of oppression and wrong-doings and down-crushings and patient long-sufferings to be altered and amended; and, pen in hand, he fought as valiantly for the pure ideals of truth and justice as ever with sword or lance did warrior knights of old.

In the great world-drama which was commenced in 1789, and of which we who live now shall scarcely see the end, the part played by André Chénier was probably the purest, the noblest, the most unselfish of any; for not only was he among the foremost to lead the people onward to rescue all that was dear to them as men and women from the clutch of a terribly oppressive authority, but when, as an almost inevitable reaction, the people themselves, with their mob-laws, their Age of Reason, their thirst for vengeance and blood, inaugurated the most appalling tyranny that the world has ever witnessed, he again dared, this time almost alone, to take the side of the weakest, to battle for a liberty that should be governed by law, for a justice that should be tempered by toleration. Nearly single-handed, he tried to stem the rushing floods of massacres and madnesses and miseries; he attacked openly—almost wantonly—men whose scowling hatred foreboded death; and when at last he found that all his struggles were ineffectual, he cried that it were better to deserve the guillotine than to enjoy life in times like these. And, in his death-hour, turning, as if for consolation, again to poetry—still the strongest passion in his mind save that

of patriotism—he found his loveliest inspiration at the very foot of the scaffold. Dying with his poems unpublished, with, alas! too many of them unwritten, it was not until he was for the last time dragged from his dungeon that he gave utterance to hopes and aspirations hitherto intensely self-contained, for, smiting his forehead with his hand, he cried, "And yet I had something there!" Five-and-twenty years after this, when for the first time his poems were presented to the public, the world gave a unanimous, though tardy verdict that the words were spoken not idly nor in vanity, but in the spirit of true prophecy, in the consciousness of innate genius, of actual performance.

The family of Chénier was originally of Poitou origin, deriving, indeed, its name from a little hamlet in that province. For generations the eldest son had occupied, by a kind of inherited right, the official situation of inspector of mines in Languedoc. Louis de Chénier, the father of a family that in no less than three of its members was afterwards to be famous, received from his ancestors a very slender patrimony, which he generously handed over to his sister, being determined to seek his own fortunes abroad. At Constantinople he speedily contrived to found a business of some importance; but a commercial career was not at all suited to his eager and ambitious hopes, and he soon quitted the counting-house, to occupy a place in the French Embassy at the Ottoman Court. Here his aptitude for diplomacy, and the uprightness and inflexibility of his character, procured him the warm friendship of the Consul-General, who, on his

death-bed, nominated young Chénier as his delegate—an office he efficiently executed until a new ambassador was appointed. In Constantinople he married a young Greek lady, Mdlle. Santi l'Homaka—sister, by the way, to the grandmother of M. Thiers. During the ten years of their married life spent in the East, she brought him four sons and a daughter—the third son, André Chénier, being born upon the 30th October, 1762. In 1765, Louis de Chénier returned with his family to France, where he hoped to push forward his diplomatic career, and in a short time he succeeded in obtaining a situation in Africa, which ultimately led to his appointment as *chargé d'affaires* to the Emperor of Morocco; and in 1767, attended by his devoted wife, he again set sail, leaving the children under the care of that sister to whom, as quite a boy, he had behaved with so much brotherly generosity.

The two eldest lads were sent at once to the College of Navarre, at Paris; but André and Joseph passed the most impressionable years of their lives with their aunt, under the lovely sky of Languedoc, beside the borders of the Aude. It was the very country for a poet's childhood—a little romance-land, bounded on the south by the eastern Pyrenees, on the north by the Haute Garonne, on the east by the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean. Strangely varied in its scenery—now bleak and desolate round the lofty peaks of Bernard Sauvage, la Glêbe, and Ruse; but in the valley of the Aude itself, a fairy summer haunt set in hills and fed by a hundred mountain streams, two climates seemed abso-

lutely to meet—here summer with its olives and its vineyards, and there the wintry mountains of Alarie, with their massive piles and craters of rocks, with rugged mountain sides and torrentless gorges. Terentius Varro, the Roman poet, had been born here B.C. 116, and hence in the sturdier days of chivalry sprang the *trouvères;* and the country legends were still full of knightly tales of Moor and Christian.

Enjoying the sunshine, playing with the flowers, making childish pilgrimages to the sea or to the mountains, weaving from the songs and ballads that their nurses sung new legends to foreshadow, after boyish fashion, their own individual longings, the two lads spent a happy childhood. The peculiar scenery and imagery of Languedoc, the strong childish recollections of the pastoral innocence of the people, were fixed indelibly upon André Chénier, and are incessantly reproduced in his works. In a manuscript note he himself gives us a charming memory from the many that thronged his brain:—

"The recollection of this lovely country, its lakes, its rivers, its countless rills and streams and torrents, which I saw at an age when I scarcely knew how to see, brings me back a memory of my childhood I would never willingly lose. I could only have been eight years of age, for it is fifteen years ago (ah! how old I am growing!) when on a holiday they led me by the hand to climb a mountain. There were many people there at their prayers. To the right of the road there was a spring, under a hollowed vault, carved out of the moun-

tain side, and under the same little roof there were one or two Madonnas. The water was deliciously fresh and sparkling. As well as I can remember this must have been near a town named Lirnoux, in Lower Languedoc. After walking for a long time we came to a lovely little church, and here there was another and a larger well. I shall tell no one where this was, for I shall have a secret joy in finding it again, when my travels lead me into the country. If ever in a land I love I possess a haven after my own fantasy, I will arrange there if I can a fountain after the same fashion, with a statue to the nymphs, with an inscription like one of those old ones, *de fontibus sacris, &c.*"

About the year 1773, Madame de Chénier returned from Africa and took up her abode at Paris, to superintend the education of her sons, and the two youngest now joined their brothers at the College of Navarre.

Madame de Chénier was a lady of refinement, wit, and even learning. Beautiful she had been with the beauty of old Greece, and endowed with something of the poetical and graceful mobility of the women of ancient Athens. She now willingly exchanged the delights of the song and the dance, in which she had excelled, for the cultivation of letters and the pleasures of the mind. Brought up amid the poetical memories of bygone times, with a keen sense of their beauties and with an accurate knowledge of the grand old language in which they had been embalmed, it seemed as though across the ages it had been granted her to preserve within herself something of the rhythm and perfume of

of the past, of world-old legends, of eternal loveliness, to cherish the fresh young intellect of her favourite son André, as other mothers supply the physical cravings of their offspring. Aided by her, he made a rapid progress in his classical studies, and at fourteen he was the first Greek scholar in the college, for volumes that to other lads were but dismal threatenings of punishments to come, were to him the relics of a holy fatherland. Turning, as most boys of genius do, to other books than those provided by their masters, he even then began to translate Sappho and Anacreon with feeling and sweetness, for they seemed, heard from his mother's lips, to be his own national songs. At sixteen he was said to have had a perfect knowledge of Greek. At the College he formed boyish friendships—often the most lasting of all—with the Panges and the Trudaines, and they already shared his ambitions and acknowledged his supremacy. At the end of 1779 he left college altogether, and for the next two years he joined the brilliant circle of which his talented mother was the centre and the idol.

As soon as Madame de Chénier had taken up her abode in Paris, her *salon* became the rendezvous of a a remarkable assembly. The future was gloomy with forebodings, for the old world was drifting by, and on all sides little coteries were formed; "the two grand shades of Voltaire and Rousseau seemed to preside over these gatherings, for all the world, the women above the rest, had something of the soul of Jean-Jacques and the mind of Voltaire."

Men then celebrated, or to be famous in the

mighty times to come, met together in these rooms —poets and magistrates, diplomatists and painters, musicians and historians. There was Le Brun, the "French Pindar" of the day, occupying the throne by an act of courteous usurpation, and requisitioning from all the pleasant incense of flattery, for the shepherds and shepherdesses, the gods and goddesses, his muse put forth in powder and patches and Watteau skirts and furbelows. Still he had talent enough to perceive the genius of André, and, though thrice his age, became a warm and constant companion; sometimes a master, often an imitator, always a friend. Many of the faults in André's compositions are to be traced to this early influence. There was David, already in the zenith of his fame, who was regenerating French art as André was to regenerate French poetry. The great painter felt a strong and permanent interest in the young student's career—had him for ever in his studio, gave him lessons in drawing, laughed at his efforts, and yet followed his advice. There were young people, too, in that charming circle—the brothers Panges and the brothers Trudaine, the Marquis de Brazais among the most regular; all dabbling in, at all events verse-making. Here in the winter evenings, under the joint presidency of Le Brun and Madame de Chénier, their poems were read, gently criticized, and warmly flattered. Here mutual hopes were confided, mutual encouragements given, for all meant some day to do something very great and very wonderful, and all tried in the mean time to filch a little pleasure and excitement from the fame the future had in store. André

alone displayed a close reserve as to his literary projects; his study and his own brain were his only confidants, and much coercion and many innocent frauds were used before his poems could be brought up for judgment. An inflexible resolution made him adopt this course, for his genius was already spontaneously developed, and was acknowledged far and wide. Nothing would have been easier than, in the *recueils* of the day, to have speedily out-distanced Le Brun himself. But he seems to have had no care whatever for the ephemeral fame that contemporary praise bestows. Not so with his brother Joseph, who was already thirsting for immediate applause, and who, still a boy, had abandoned himself to all the dictates of literary vanity.

André, however, had one passion that could not be concealed—common to that age of great men, to the Voltaires, the Diderots—the burning desire for knowledge, the fever of universality. "To know how to read, to know how to think," are, he tells us, "the indispensable preliminaries of the art of writing." Before the day dawned he was at his books, garnering beauties from ancient poets and wisdom from modern philosophers; laboriously annotating Homer and Plato, yet studying the worthiest works that England, Germany, and Italy have produced; writing poetry already, he was still deep in the mysteries of science, yet at the same time applying himself to a closely conscientious study of the French language, with the same clearness and exactitude as if it had been a foreign tongue; then coming from out his world of old books to be the ornament of that distin-

guished coterie; loving his friends as earnestly as he shunned all mere acquaintances.

At this time André was nineteen years of age. He possessed the energy and stubbornness of his father's character; the enthusiasm, the sensibility, the passionate love of the beautiful, of his mother's. He was of a medium stature; his forehead bold and high; his hair of a light chestnut, clustering round his head in thick crisp curls; his eyes a grey blue, small, but very brilliant. La Comtesse Hocquart used to say that he had large features and an enormous head; was full of a mystic charm, yet positively ugly.

His resolution as to life had been formed from the very first. He says, "Opening my eyes and looking round me on leaving childhood, I saw everywhere that gold and intrigue were almost the only goals towards which all were striving. I resolved henceforth, without examining whether circumstances permitted it or not, to live for ever apart from all business, in retirement and in the most perfect liberty." His father, however, could scarcely be expected to share those delightful and Utopian views, and, as soon as his son arrived at the years of manhood, pressed upon him the necessity of embracing a career, urging him to choose that of diplomacy, in which the family interest chiefly lay. André preferred, since a preference was necessary, a military life, and in the year 1782 he joined the regiment d'Angoumois, then stationed at Strasbourg, as "garrison cadet."

The dreary routine of garrison life, the strict disci-

pline, the tedious drills, proved necessarily but little to his liking; still the long leisure hours permitted him to return with renewed energy to his studies; and in these he was joined by the Marquis de Brazais, one of his boyish friends. At Strasbourg he met Brunck, the single eminent Greek scholar that France was then able to oppose to the *savants* of England and Germany. Brunck, like Chénier, had been a soldier; and, like him, was possessed with a passion for the antique. This love had, however, only been awakened in him at the age of thirty; and, now an official of high standing, he might be seen going, like a school-boy, with his books under his arm, to attend the lectures of the Greek professor at the university. Few men since the revival of learning have done so much for Greek literature as Brunck; though the idea upon which he always acted, that all the irregularities occurring in the Greek poets were the handiwork of the copyists, led him to make bold alterations of his own, not always of the happiest. Still his love for Greek poetry was familiar, if not reverent. In after-times he entered warmly into the cause of the Revolution, and, little by little, sold off his fine collection of Greek books for the benefit of the cause. From that moment Greek literature became hateful to his memory; tears sprang to his eyes when one of his once-loved authors was casually named. With Brunck Chénier formed a lively friendship, and to Brunck's "Analectæ" many of his contemporary and after poems are very largely indebted. To this period are due the earliest of the beautiful imitations and idylls based upon Theocritus and others. In the

fine fragment of "Invention," Chénier tells us, with a mingling of bold acknowledgment and loving reverence,

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"Changeons en notre miel leurs plus antiques fleurs,
Pour peindre notre idée empruntons leurs couleurs;
Allumons nos flambeaux à leurs feux poétiques;
Sur des pensers nouveaux faisons des vers antiques."

The epistles to Le Brun and the earliest of the idylls prove how thoroughly he was imbued with this "ancient fire"—they exhibit a wonderful blending of classic memories and modern inspiration. "Le Mendiant" and

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"MNAZILE ET CHLOÉ.

Chloé.

"'Fleurs, bocage sonore, et mobiles roseaux,
Où murmure Zéphyre au murmure des eaux,
Parlez, le beau Mnazile est-il sous vos ombrages?
Il visite souvent vos paisibles rivages.
Souvent j'écoute, et l'air qui gémit dans vos bois
À mon oreille au loin vient apporter sa voix.'

Mnazile.

"'Onde, mère des fleurs, naïade transparente,
Qui pressez mollement cette enceinte odorante,
Amenez-y Chloé, l'amour de mes regards.
Vos bords m'offrent souvent ses vestiges épars.
Souvent ma bouche vient, sous vos sombres allées,
Baiser l'herbe et les fleurs que ses pas ont foulées.'

Chloé.

"'Oh! s'il pouvait savoir quel amoureux ennui
Me rend cher ce bocage où je rêve de lui!
Peut-être je devrais d'un souris favorable
L'inviter, l'engager à me trouver aimable.'

how much indebted he was, at all events at this early period, to the inspiration of Greek poetry :—

"Let us change to golden honey flowers whose fragrance aye will last ;—
Paint the thoughts that throng the present with the colours of the past ;
Let us light our modern torches at the old poetic fires,
Sing us songs to rouse and wake us to the tunes of ancient lyres."

"L'Aveugle" are, says Villemain, "a page torn as it were from some old Greek manuscript, but written by something more than a modern pen. Of these delicious idylls we can but quote the shortest :—

"MNAZILUS AND CHLOE.

Chloë.

"'O flower-strewn borders ! O tall reeds blowing
In rhythmic tune to the water flowing !
Oh, tell me is Mnazilus near your glades ?
Often he comes to your peaceful shades,
And often I wish that the wandering air
Would bring me a message when he is there.'

Mnazilus.

"'O stream ! the mother of flowers, you hold
This scented dell in your girdling fold ;
Why do you not bring to your winding thrall
Chloë, the daintiest flower of all !'

Chloë.

"'If he but knew that I came to dream
Of love, and of him beside the stream !
Oh, if a glance or a tender smile
Could make him tarry a little while——'

Mnazile.

"'Si pour m'encourager quelque dieu bienfaiteur
Lui disait que son nom fait palpiter mon cœur!
J'aurais dû l'inviter, d'une voix douce et tendre,
À se laisser aimer, à m'aimer, à m'entendre.'

Chloé.

"'Ah! je l'ai vu; c'est lui. Dieux! je vais lui parler!
O ma bouche! ô mes yeux! gardez de vous troubler.'

Mnazile.

"'Le feuillage a frémi. Quelque robe légère . . .
C'est elle! ô mes regards! ayez soin de vous taire.'

Chloé.

"'Quoi! Mnazile est ici? Seule, errante, mes pas
Cherchaient ici le frais et ne t'y croyaient pas.'

Mnazile.

"'Seul, au bord de ces flots que le tilleul couronne,
J'avais fui le soleil et n'attendais personne'"

. . . . . .

This is a very epitome of first love, with its blushing coyness, its new-born, strange, unuttered desires. Of the

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"J'étais un faible enfant qu'elle était grande et belle;
Elle me souriait et m'appelait près d'elle.
Debout sur ses genoux, mon innocente main
Parcourait ses cheveux, son visage, son sein,
Et sa main quelquefois, aimable et caressante,
Feignait de châtier mon enfance imprudente.
C'est devant ses amants, auprès d'elle confus,
Que la fière beauté me caressait le plus.
Que de fois (mais, hélas! que sent-on à cet âge?)
Les baisers de sa bouche ont pressé mon visage!
Et les bergers disaient, me voyant triomphant:
'O! que de biens perdus! O trop heureux enfant!'"

Mnazilus.

"'Oh, if some kind god would breathe a word
Of the thoughts with which my heart is stirr'd,
Then dare I pray her, when she was near me,
To let me love her, at least to hear me!'

Chloë.

"'O joy,' tis he!—he speaks—I tremble—
Be quiet, O lips! O eyes, dissemble!'

Mnazilus.

"'The foliage rustled—methought I heard—
'Tis she! O eyes, say never a word!'

Chloë.

"'What, Mnazilus here? how strange to meet
With you in this lonely green retreat!'

Mnazilus.

"'Alone I lay in the shady grass,
And never expected a soul to pass!'"

. . . . . .

"Fragments," due also to this period, we quote a specimen, which in the original has a wonderful blending of simplicity, innocence, and *volupté*:—

"I was but a weakly infant, she a stately maid and tall,
Yet with many a smiling promise, many a soft and winsome call,
She would snatch me to her bosom, cradle me and rock me there,
Let my childish fingers trifle with the glories of her hair;
Smother me awhile with caresses—for a moment's space again,
As if shocked with my o'erboldness, feign to chide, but only feign.
Yet it was when lovers thronged her, a confused and bashful host,
That the proud, disdainful beauty caressed and fondled me the most.
Often, often—(oh, how foolish childhood's innocent alarms!)—
Has she cover'd me with kisses as I struggled in her arms;
While the shepherds murmur'd round us, as triumphantly I smiled,
'Oh what thrilling joys are wasted! Oh! too happy, happy child!'"

In spite, however, of these pleasant labours, and of severer studies—for these he never abandoned—the routine of duties and pleasures, of watches and balls, incidental to a garrison life, became so insupportable to André Chénier that after a six months' trial he resigned his

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"Je meurs. Avant le soir j'ai fini ma journée.
À peine ouverte au jour, ma rose s'est fanée.
La vie eut bien pour moi des volages douceurs
Je la goûtais à peine, et voilà que je meurs."

Nor was this alarm uncalled for; and though, owing chiefly to the tender nursing of his mother, the poet's life was spared, his medical advisers considered it most essential that he should for a while be completely severed from his books. The brothers Trudaine, with a loving solicitude, planned a journey that they thought would tempt him away, and insisted that the invalid should accompany them to the East. The hope of viewing in reality the ruins of that old world he saw so often in his dreams—the glorious relics of Rome and Athens, the gorgeous splendours of the Orient—revived hope, and even health. "Under a lovelier sky," he writes, "my sickness and misery will be charmed away."

They went through Italy, Asia Minor, and Greece, and Chénier was thus the first poet to open the road to the East to Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Byron, Gautier, and others, who have again sung the beauties of its scenery, its grandeur, its magnificence. For his own part, however, he saw much and wrote but little, and in that little an excited admiration is visible, which by its own enthusiasm is compelled to fall back upon memories rather than

commission, left Strasbourg, and returned home to enjoy the precious liberty of poverty. But as soon as he re-applied himself to his books, he found that his health had been most seriously injured by over-work. He writes despondingly to one of his friends:—

"I am dying—my brief daytime ended ere the evening gloom,
And my poor rose faded, wither'd, while as yet 'twas scarce in bloom;
Life for me had many pleasures, lightly, softly flitting by;
I have scarce had time to taste them—scarce, and yet, behold, I die!'

---

to create anew. The ultimate effect of this journey upon his art is evident enough; but his contemporary writings consist chiefly of fragments of poetry and prose intermingled, meant eventually to be used in one grand poem, but very beautiful in their rough form, fresh from the quarry of a master-mind.

In Italy, in Greece, lands where the arts were born, his hand tried vainly to fix upon paper the glories of rapidly succeeding images of landscape loveliness, of grass-grown stones, and mouldering ruins instinct with the pure art of times now dead, yet still calling up burning thoughts of liberty and glory. At Naples he first heard Italian music, and he continues:—

"The blood rushes to my face, and they tell me that my reason has need of soothing hellebore. But first for things far more important! . . . . I fly to the forum, to the senate. I am surrounded with sublime shadows. I hear the voices of Gracchus, of Cincinnatus, Cato, Brutus; I see the Palace where Germanicus and his wife have dwelt. . . . . Perish those who say that admiration for those antique models is a prejudice, who will not confess

that those grand virtues which alone are solid and enduring, belong only to lands where liberty is cherished! *Hos utinam inter heroas tellus me prima tulisset.* Ah! if I had lived in those times! . . . But oh, my two friends, my fellow voyagers! I cannot even wish to have lived in a better world, from which you should have been absent. Would to heaven that we had been there together! We would have formed a triumvirate more virtuous than that. . . . . But let us live now as those great men lived then! Let Fortune act towards us as she please; *we are three to one against her!*"

In the epistle written on quitting France, his affections had been divided between the friends he left behind and those with whom he was to travel, but a genuine joy sparkles through his songs when in good health and glorious spirits he returned.

No sooner was he again settled in his family than he betook himself to his studies with the same energy as of old—rising before daylight and burning the midnight oil; it being still his primary ambition to master the entire circle of human knowledge, and then to devote this wealth of learning to his art. "Work! work!" he sings, "dare to achieve this glorious victory! Still is there need of further proofs, of further reasons! Work on!—a great example is a powerful witness! . . . . Oh, if I could some day!" . . .

Throughout Chénier's whole career, the distinction becoming more vividly demarcated month by month, there were two sides to his character; the one belonging to the pursuit of pleasure, to the world of elegance and beauty and sparkling wit, to the discussion of political

questions (this last was in graver times to absorb the rest); the other, his own inner life, given wholly and solely to meditation, to study, to poetry. And at this epoch study and pleasure seem to have shared his days between them; the one in no wise interfering with the other. When he could escape from his books it was to fling himself at the feet of Camille; and the love he felt for her—the joyousness of eager youth, the exuberance of a desire to be caressed—was then celebrated in poetry whose passionate and gracious sweetness has never been surpassed. All the beauty of ancient singers, all the secret mysteries of many years of midnight toil, were used to sound her praises, for "in them he found," says Villemain, "that natural and gracious abandon, that variety of tone, that expressive simplicity and frankness of feeling which has and needs no other ornament than its own vivacity, its own innocent boldness—exquisite qualities, which other writers at the close of the eighteenth century stifled under the tawdry finery of a finnikin elegance." But still the love for Madame de Bonneuil—for "Camille" that is—though ever so beautifully expressed, was the passion of Romeo for Rosaline, not for Juliet—a training merely for young feelings longing for sympathy and affinity. Seeking an inspiration in her arms, he still loved his art more than his mistress. "Camille est un besoin dont rien ne me soulage;"—a want essential to the perfection of his genius, but not yet an absorbing portion of his very self. It was, however, in vain that his friends urged him to tune his lyre to loftier airs; love was natural to his age, essentially natural to his genius; and his artistic instincts prompted him to

write only upon subjects he could thoroughly feel, for which he had ample knowledge and a perfect training, "Let them whisper," he sings, "each girl, each stripling.

"Jadis, il m'en souvient, quand les bois du Permesse
Recevaient ma première et bouillante jeunesse,
Plein de ces grands objets, ivre de chants guerriers,
Respirant la mêlée et les cruels lauriers,
Je me couvrais de fer, et d'une main sanglante
J'animais aux combats ma lyre turbulente ;
Des arrêts du destin prophète audacieux,
J'abandonnais la terre et volais chez les dieux.

. . . . . .

"Si quelquefois encore, à tes conseils docile,
Ou jouet d'un esprit vagabond et mobile,
Je veux, de nos héros admirant les exploits,
À des sons généreux solliciter ma voix,
Aux sons voluptueux ma voix accoutumée
Fuit, se refuse et lutte, incertaine, alarmée ;
Et ma main, dans mes vers de travail tourmentés,
Poursuit avec effort de pénibles beautés.
Mais si, bientôt lassé de ces poursuites folles,
Je retourne à mes riens que tu nommes frivoles,
Si je chant[e] Camille, alors écoute, vois !
Les vers pour la chanter naissent autour de moi.
Tout pour elle a des vers ! Ils renaissent en foule ;
Ils brillent dans les flots du ruisseau qui s'écoule ;
Ils prennent des oiseaux la voix et les couleurs ;
Je les trouve cachés dans les replis des fleurs.
Son sein a le duvet de ce fruit que je touche ;
Cette rose au matin sourit comme sa bouche ;
La miel qu'ici l'abeille eut soin de déposer
Ne vaut pas à mon cœur le miel de son baiser.
Tout pour elle a des vers ! Ils me viennent sans peine,
Doux comme son parler, doux comme son haleine.
Quoi qu'elle fasse ou dise, un mot, un geste heureux,
Demande un gros volume à mes vers amoureux.

. . . . . .

'This loving poet, who knew me so well, when he painted his own heart, had first read mine.'" We quote some lines from an elegy to Camille, beautiful in themselves, exquisite as a pleading of defence:—

"Yet long ago, when burning youth was young,
In many a woody glade my thoughts I sung;
Full of vast objects, drunk with warrior's songs,
Breathing of bloody bays and battling throngs,
Covering myself with steel, with eyes afire,
To combats I attuned my sounding lyre;
Mad with audacious thoughts of high emprize,
I left the earth and flew towards the skies.

. . . . . .

"But sometimes now, obedient to your will,
Or lured by vagrant fancy I would still
The lofty deeds of 'Plutarch's Men' rehearse
In spirit-stirring, generous-sounding verse;
My voice, accustomed to voluptuous charms,
Refuses, struggles, flies in wild alarms;
My hand tormented, tries in vain to clasp
The labour'd beauties flitting from its grasp;
But if, soon wearied, my dull'd spirit flies
Again to those poor nothings you despise,
If I sing Camille's charms, my loving song
In glowing verse flows trippingly along;
Verses to chant her praise around me spring,
In clustering crowds to heaven and earth they cling;
All things for her have verses, for they seem
To sparkle in each wavelet on the stream;
They take the bird's sweet voice and brilliant hue,
They hide in flower-buds, rich with pearly dew;
Her breast has all the peach's ripest bloom,
Her mouth the rose's smile and rare perfume;
The bee tho' flitting from that flower to this,
Bears no such honey as her balmy kiss.
All Nature brings a poem within my reach,
Sweet as her breath, melodious as her speech;
Whate'er she does or says, a word, a look,
Would fill the pages of a mighty book.

. . . . . .

"Heureux qui peut trouver des muses complaisantes,
Dont la voix sollicite et mène à ses désirs
Une jeune beauté qu'appelaient ses soupirs.
Hier, entre ses bras, sur sa lèvre fidèle
J'ai surpris quelques vers que j'avais faits pour elle,
Et sa bouche, au moment que je l'allais quitter,
M'a dit 'Tes vers sont doux, j'aime à les répéter.'
Si cette voix eût dit même chose à Virgile,
Abel, dans ses hameaux il eût chanté Camille,
N'eût point cherché la palme au sommet d'Hélicon,
Et le glaive d'Enée eût épargné Didon."

But even at this time the love for Camille, full of outbreaks and lovers' quarrels as it was, was far from an absorbing passion. "Il veut qu'on aime réellement la beauté qu'on célèbre,"—we cannot doubt the veracity with which he wrote it—and Lycoris and Glycère, Amélie and Rose were often passing rivals.

There was then a strange world in Paris of men of letters, artists, grand lords, and ladies—noble sometimes, always beautiful and often more than light o' loves. But a few years back, and Voltaire, like another Jeremiah, had prophesied the end of all existing order, of every present rule and form of society and rank. They were now standing as it were upon the abyss of a volcano. The air was heavy with the sulphurous fumes of an eruption that might at any moment be precipitated, that could not possibly be long delayed. It was too late to look back, too early to look forward, and pleasure—sparkling as the raillery of French philosophy, mad as the orgies of the Roman Empire, cynical as the innermost thoughts of Diogenes—was the one aim of each

" Oh happy he who breathes in every line
Seductive wishes, like these songs of mine,
Whose glowing muses guide him on his lyre,
In every note he sings, to love's desire!
'Twas last night when I lay at Camille's feet,
I heard her soft lips lovingly repeat,
In pride for me and for herself in shame,
A song in which I sang my darling's fame.
If these sweet lips had breathed in Virgil's days,
He would have sung of naught but Camille's praise;
And saved poor Dido from her wild desire
For Eneas' fickle love, and from the funeral pyre."

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man's life and each woman's life. It was the time of those famous suppers given by La Reynière, of which Rétif de la Bretonne was the indiscreet historian; and in his voluminous and garrulous works we find express mention of the presence of André Chénier and the Trudaines in February, 1784, and March, 1786. At these *noctes cœnæque deûm* met all who were most famous in Paris for wit, for beauty, for thoroughness in some sort, were it only the thoroughness of profligacy. Politics were eagerly debated; poems that were to make a reputation were first read, the past, the present, the future of the nation discussed—and this in the midst of songs and music and dancing, of mad peals of ringing laughter interrupting orgies unutterably amorous—men forgetting all but pleasure, women mindful of nothing but their beauty.

Chénier has given us the spirit of these meetings in an elegy never to be forgotten, but scarcely to be quoted here. The same elegy shows us, however, that these were but passing *éclairs de plaisir* in the midst of a student's life. "O Gods!" he whispers, "If Camille

were to hear where I have been, what a storm would follow this boasted banquet! What cries, reproaches, tears, though not even fury could harshen her low voice; what blows struck with vengeful arms, not strong for much but loving claspings!"

This period, however, with all its sudden outbursts, gave us some of the finest of the idylls, especially *Le Jeune Malade*, where, says Villemain, "the loveliest memories of grief, the ardours of maternal affection, the despairs and the joys of love, are traced with an un-

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"'C'est ta mère, ta vieille inconsolable mère,
Qui pleure, qui jadis te guidait pas à pas,
T'asseyait sur son sein, te portait dans ses bras,
Que tu disais aimer, qui t'apprit à le dire;
Qui chantait, et souvent te forçait à sourire
Lorsque tes jeunes dents, par de vives douleurs,
De tes yeux enfantins faisaient couler des pleurs.
Tiens, presse de ta lèvre, hélas! pale et glacée,
Par qui cette mamelle était jadis pressée,
Un suc qui te nourisse et vienne à ton secours,
Comme autrefois mon lait nourrit tes premiers jours.'"

And he replies:—

"'O côteaux d'Erymanthe! ô vallons! ô bocage!
O vent sonore et frais qui troublais le feuillage,
Et faisais frémir l'onde, et sur leur jeune sein
Agitais les replis de leur robe de lin!
De légères beautés, troupe agile et dansante . . .
Tu sais, tu sais, ma mère? aux bords de l'Erymanthe,
Là, ni loups ravisseurs, ni serpents, ni poisons . . .
O visage divin! ô fêtes! ô chansons!
Des pas entrelacés, des fleurs, une onde pure,
Aucun lieu n'est si beau dans toute la nature.
Dieux! ces bras et ces fleurs, ces cheveux, ces pieds nus,
Si blancs, si délicats! je ne les verrai plus!

equalled pen, with ineffable harmony." This idyll gives us the two extremes—a mutual motherly and filial tenderness, and a first love, young, pure and timid, yet passionate to the verge of the grave. It is, however, of some considerable length, and we can only give the outline of the story.

Watching beside her son's sick couch for restless, feverish nights together, the mother again implores him to tell her what fatal malady it is that ails him—to confess to her—to her only:—

"'Tis your poor mother's prayer,
'Tis she who reared you with a mother's care;
Clasp'd in these arms, and nestling on this breast
She sang your childish troubles into rest;
She wiled your pattering footsteps thro' the hall,
With many a promised gift and beckoning call;
She bade you love her, till your prattling voice
Mimick'd the sound and made her heart rejoice.
O cold, pale lips, why should you madly shun
To taste this healing potion? O my son!
Would I could press you to these breasts of mine,
And pour my life's warm essence into thine!'"

"'O hills of Erymanthus, valleys, glades!
O fresh, sonorous winds that stir the shades,
And make the water tremble, till its breast
Seems surging 'gainst the charms of too deep rest;
For there, my mother, there beside the lake,
Comes never deep-fang'd wolf nor venom'd snake;—
But damsels, dancing in a hundred throngs—
O lovely face, O pleasure-days, O songs!
No other place on earth is half so fair,
O twining limbs, and flowers, and flowing hair!
O dainty feet, shall I ne'er see you more?
O mother, bear me to the happy shore—

Oh! portez, portez-moi sur les bords d'Erymanthe,
Que je la voie encor, cette vierge charmante!
Oh! que je voie au loin la fumée à longs flots
S'élever de ce toit au bord de cet enclos . . .
Assise à tes côtés, ses discours, sa tendresse,
La voir, trop heureux père! enchanter ta vieillesse.
Dieux! par dessus la haie élevée en ramparts,
Je la vois, à pas lents, en longs cheveux épars,
Seule, sur un tombeau, pensive, inanimée,
S'arrêter et pleurer sa mère bien aimée.
Oh! que tes yeux sont doux! que ton visage est beau!
Viendras-tu point aussi pleurer sur mon tombeau?
Viendras-tu point aussi, la plus belle des belles,
Dire sur mon tombeau: "Les Parques sont cruelles!"'"

Endeavouring to discover which of the neighbouring beauties it was, his mother runs through their names,

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"'Dieux! ma mère, tais-toi,
Tais-toi. Dieux! qu'as-tu dit? Elle est fière, inflexible;
Comme les immortels, elle est belle et terrible!
Mille amants l'ont aimée; ils l'ont aimée en vain.
Comme eux j'aurais trouvé quelque réfus hautain.
Non, garde que jamais elle soit informée...
Mais, ô mort! ô tourment! ô mère bien-aimée!
Tu vois dans quels ennuis dépérissent mes jours.
Écoute ma prière et viens à mon secours:
Je meurs; va la trouver. Que tes traits, que ton âge,
De sa mère à ses yeux offrent la sainte image;
Tiens, prends cette corbeille et nos fruits les plus beaux;
Prends notre Amour d'ivoire, honneur de ces hameaux;
Prends la coupe d'onyx à Corinthe ravie;
Prends mes jeunes chevreaux, prends mon cœur, prends ma vie,
Jette tout à ses pieds; apprends-lui qui je suis;
Dis-lui que je me meurs, que tu n'as plus de fils.
Tombe aux pieds du vieillard, gémis, implore, presse;
Adjure cieux et mers, dieu, temple, autel, déesse;
Pars; et si tu reviens sans les avoir fléchis,
Adieu, ma mère, adieu, tu n'auras plus de fils.'"

Oh! let me see this once before I die—
The still smoke floating in the lazy sky
Above the cot, as in weird shapes it twines,
And that sweet maid beneath the clustering vines,
Cheering her father with her maiden wiles,
And sweet home converse, and sweet home-bred smiles.
O Gods! I see her as she makes her way
With tardy footsteps, o'er the waves of hay;
I see her resting sadly, as she weeps
Above the tomb where her dead mother sleeps.
Soft yearning eyes, O will you ever shine
Thro' loving tears, upon a tomb of mine?
And when you near it, darling, will you wait
To murmur for a moment against Fate?'"

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and when with a disparaging dread she mentions Daphnis, he interrupts:—

"'Mother! what would you say?
That she is proud and pitiless as they
Who sit on starry thrones? Yet all who see
Have loved her madly—loved in vain like me.
O mother, let me die, nor let her learn
With what a dying passionate love I yearn.
O death! O torment! O sweet mother mine!
You see me how I sicken, how I pine—
Seek her before I die, perchance your years
Will tell of her loved mother mourn'd with tears—
O take this basket fill'd with fruits and flowers,
This onyx cup won in Corinthian strife,
This ivory Love—the hamlet's pride and ours—
Take my young goats—O take my heart—my life—
Throw all beneath her feet, tell her that I
With burning passion languish till I die;
Fall at the old man's feet, with tears and sighs
Adjure him by the gods, the seas, the skies;
O mother, start, and if you come again,
Without good tidings you will come in vain.'"

" '—J'aurais toujours un fils ; va, la belle espérance
Me dit.' Elle s'incline, et dans un doux silence
Elle couvre ce front, terni par les douleurs,
De baisers maternels entremêlés de pleurs.
Puis elle sort en hâte, inquiète et tremblante,
Sa demarche de crainte et d'âge chancelante.
Elle arrive ; et bientôt revenant sur ses pas,
Haletante, de loin : 'Mon cher fils, tu vivras,
Tu vivras.' Elle vient s'asseoir près de la couche :
La vieillard la suivait, le sourire à la bouche,
La jeune belle aussi, rouge et le front baissé,
Vient, jette sur le lit un coup d'œil. L'insensé
Tremble ; sous ses tapis il veut cacher sa tête.
' Ami, depuis trois jours, tu n'es d'aucune fête,'
Dit elle ; ' que fais-tu ? Pourquoi veux-tu mourir ?
Tu souffres. On me dit que je peux te guérir ;
Vis, et formons ensemble une seule famille :
Que mon père ait un fils, et ta mère une fille.' "

To this period are due also the grand fragments of *Suzanne* and *Hermes*, in the latter of which, from a modern standpoint, he aimed at rivalling Lucretius's *Natura Rerum*. "There would," says Sainte-Beuve, "have been three books, dealing (1) with the creation of the world, with animals and man; (2) on man, the mechanism of his senses, his intelligence, his errors from first birth to the dawn of civilization and the origin of religion; (3) upon society politic, the constitution of morals and the discovery of the sciences. The whole to have been closed by an *exposé* of the system of the world according to the most advanced scientific notions of the time."

Such, at five and twenty, were the works written, began and projected, "Nothing," he tells us, "is finished to-day, but all will be ended to-morrow!"

" 'My son shall live, 'tis fond hope tells me this,'
She bent her down for one last lingering kiss;
On that pale brow, how wan beyond its years,
But one long kiss, and then with streaming tears
She went her way with aged trembling feet
Half failing, and half struggling to be fleet.
She came again with panting bated breath—
'O you shall live, my son! away, O death!'
Then fell beside his couch. The old man came
And the young damsel, blushing in sweet shame;
Quivering with hope and joy, the sufferer hid
His trembling head beneath the coverlid.
With lips that falter'd and with cheeks ablaze—
'Dear, you have had no joy for three long days,
They tell me that a foolish girl, that I
Can save you from your suffering—Would you die?
Sweet, live for me, and let our homes be one!
Your parent have a daughter—mine a son!' "

Joseph had already flung himself, with his versatile and irregular talents, into the arena of public writing; being hissed and praised, and hissed again;* but André had sufficient confidence to wait. His works were, and he must silently have felt it, for the world's wonderment to the end of time, not for the garrulous small talk of contemporary cackle.

The stern necessities of which Horace sings, the *dure necessité* of André's elegies, now put an end to these quiet labours, to this independent standing. His family, though enjoying a good social standing, were far from

* Felix, Count de France d'Hézecques, in the *Recollections of a Page at the Court of Louis XVI.*, states that Joseph Chénier was moved to his hatred of kings generally, and of Louis XVI. in particular, because that unlucky monarch gave the first hiss when his tragedy of *Azemire* was acted at Fontainebleau.

wealthy; and his father, a man of intensely active life, insisted that he should embrace a diplomatic career. The elegy of *Liberté* was written in March of 1787, while hope was struggling with duty, and is, under disguise, a precious revelation of his soul.

"Le Berger.

"'Va, patrie et vertu ne sont que de vains noms,
Toutefois tes discours sont pour moi des affronts:
Ton prétendu bonheur et m'afflige et me brave;
Comme moi, je voudrais que tu fusses esclave.'

Le Chevrier.

"'Et moi, je te voudrais libre, heureux comme moi.
Mais les dieux n'ont-ils point de remède pour toi?
Il est des baumes doux, des lustrations pures,
Qui peuvent de notre âme assoupir les blessures
Et de magiques chants qui tarissent les pleurs.'

Le Berger.

"'Il n'en est point; il n'est pour moi que des douleurs,
Mon sort est de servir, il faut qu'il s'accomplisse.
Moi, j'ai ce chien aussi, qui tremble à mon service;
C'est mon esclave aussi. Mon désespoir muet
Ne peut rendre qu'à lui tous les maux qu'on me fait.'

Le Chevrier.

"'La terre, notre mère, et sa douce richesse
Sont-elles sans pouvoir pour bannir ta tristesse?
Vois la belle campagne! et vois l'été vermeil,
Prodigue de trésors, brillants fils du soleil,
Qui vient, fertile amant d'une heureuse culture,
Varier du printemps l'uniforme verdure;
Vois l'abricot naissant, sous les yeux d'un beau ciel,
Arrondir son fruit doux et blond comme le miel.
Vois la pourpre des fleurs dont le pêcher se pare
Nous annoncer l'éclat des fruits qu'il nous prépare.

La Liberté consists of a dialogue between a goatherd and a shepherd, the former a free man, the latter a slave, The goatherd with presents and tender words tries to charm away the brutal, ignorant, despairing hatred of the other, but his words, his hopes, his own enjoyments, only exasperate the shepherd's misery :—

"Shepherd.

"'Curse them! Fatherland and Virtue are but empty sounding names,
Full of subtle bitter gibings at my own cruel wrongs and shames,
For the liberty you prate of and the happiness you rave,
Make me wish you, too, were fetter'd with the thraldom of a slave.'

Goatherd.

"'Nay, poor shepherd, I would wish you all the pleasures of the free!—
Have the great gods in their mercy no one remedy for thee?—
There are balms and pure lustrations, of oblivious sweets combined,
Precious unctions for the gaping wounds and venoms of the mind :
There are magic songs whose music soothes the bitterness of tears—'

Shepherd.

"'Life to me is one eternal circle of unending fears,
All my days are girt with slavish labour till the end is come—
Yet I, too, possess a vassal, trembling, terror-stricken, dumb—
And to teach the dog I own him, I, in bitter, mute despair,
Pile on him, with blo-vs and curses, all the wrongs they make me bear.'

Goatherd.

"'Has the earth, our teeming mother, with her garnerings of gladness,
Has she not the power to banish thoughts of dim despair and sadness!
See the landscape, see the summer, now her journey has begun,
Prodigal of all her treasures, laughing children of the Sun,
Coming like a lusty lover, with a gay and happy mien,
Caressing all the springtime's colours with infinities of green.
See the peaches shaping daily, as they ripen in their bloom,
Till their sun-kiss'd sides are luscious with the fragrance of perfume!
Mark the white and purple blossoms, decking every bearing tree,
Coming to announce the glory of the fruit that is to be!

Au bord de ces prés verts regarde ces guérets,
De qui les blés touffus, jaunissantes forêts,
Du joyeux moissonneur attendent la faucille.
D'agrestes déités quelle noble famille!
La Récolte et la Paix, aux yeux purs et sereins,
Les épis sur le front, les épis dans les mains,
Qui viennent, sur les pas de la belle Espérance,
Verser la corne d'or où fleurit l'abondance.'"

But the shepherd declares that to slavish eyes the earth is hideous, sterile, and unfruitful, to be tilled with cruel labour, to be reaped for a taskmaster; not a mother, but a harsh stepmother.

In December, 1787, he started for London under the patronage of M. de Luzerne, the French ambassador at the English Court, who had been among the first to recognise his talents. Here at once he obtained the situation of secretary to the embassy. There were, however, no special duties attached to the office, and, determined to receive no money that had not been fairly earned, he quietly resolved to starve rather than draw upon his salary. He spent months of painful poverty before the ambassador fathomed this reluctance, and his Grace, feigning to be very angry, though secretly admiring the young secretary's independence, made him draw the money forthwith.

André Chénier hated England and the English—a nation he confesses to have been eager, enterprising, calculating, and constant in its projects; but ready to sell its all to those who had wherewith to purchase. In a few pages negligent in style, but poignant with suffering, he has left us an eloquent testimony of his dreary

And beside the grassy borders see the fields of waving corn—
Golden forests proudly struggling with a burthen scarcely borne,
Waiting for the joyous harvest, for the sickle and the sheaf,
For the rustic gods of autumn—of celestial nobles chief—
Peace and Ceres proudly entering with a look serenely grand—
With wheat-ears round the ample brow, and with wheat-ears in the hand,
Coming in the rosy traces of the path where young Hope goes,
And emptying out the golden horn, from whence great Plenty flows,'"

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life here. Alone and uncared for, far away from friends and sympathy, he still studied and wrote during the day, and in the night he went abroad to seek an uncongenial companionship in English taverns and coffee-houses. Wounded by the exclusive pride of the English aristocracy, he entered heartily into the great liberal movement then astir, and in the companionship of Priestley and Price, and in their doctrines, he found hopes akin to his own; and the fellowship of public duties, if not the actual pleasure of private friendship. English literature was scarcely more to his taste. Among our poets he admired only Thomson and Milton; the others, he declares, "too haughty to be slaves, had rejected the trammels even of good sense," and he bids the French bards "shun the cloying sweetness of the singers of the cloudy north."

Two years of this lonely life became insupportable. One night in April, 1789, in a common tavern, he wrote down the bitter feelings of his heart, rendered all the more desolate by events that were then occurring elsewhere. For this was the most memorable year in the world's history. Day by day the tardy news came of

some new movement upspringing to be of the gravest moment to his country. The storm was gathering to a head, and now the political, the patriotic feelings of his double life were intensely aroused. Through the years of work, of study, of dreamings, the ideal of a pure liberty had beckoned him onward, and now he longed more than ever to aid his fatherland, to cheer his fellow-countrymen forward in the glorious march to freedom already commenced. His banishment became daily more painful, and after the news of the days of June, he could bear it no longer, but fled across the Channel. In November, however, his father persuaded him to return to England, and on the 24th November he writes announcing his arrival and his painful suspense :—

"Yesterday the letters tell us that all Paris is in flames, that the tocsin is being sounded in every street. I try as hard as I can to doubt these gloomy tidings, but it is weary work waiting for the truth; for they who have announced this startling news assign no reasons, and add nothing that can give a determined proof to the terrors they have spread abroad. I have no news for you; here as in France, these are the only subjects of conversation."

Early in the spring of 1789, not even his father's earnest injunctions could keep him at his official post, and throwing up his engagement for ever he came back to France; living for a little while in retirement, waiting for events and watching them. But the Revolution was, as he says, "big with the destinies of the world," and Chénier, at once a poet and a patriot, loving liberty,

justice, and ideal equality, tore himself from his quiet retreat, from the studies he loved so well, and flung himself, heart and soul, into the vortex of political life. But the liberty he dreamed of and prayed for, "the liberty to think what one will, to write what one thinks," would, he hoped, be brought about immediately without the loss of a single drop of blood, for he detested anarchy equally with slavery, and as he shared the ideas, the dreams of the age, he shared also its generous illusions.

Centuries of down-crushing, of the monopoly of land, of wealth, of comfort by the few, who, fortunate through the accident of birth, looked upon the rest as beasts of burthen, or as pretty playthings, created to minister to their comfort or their pleasure; the glaring opposites of tyranny and serfage, of splendour and misery, had driven the minds of every generous youth throughout the world mad with the wildest schemes of liberty. At that period even Wordsworth and Southey were the rankest republicans—were from afar eagerly watching the struggles of a regenerating nation. To the literary men of Paris the crisis was still more intelligible and tangible, for they acknowledged that to their craft, to the writings of the eighteenth century past, present, and to come, all the good and all the bad of the Revolution would be due.

Chénier's first step was, together with his immediate friends, to join the "Society of 1789"—a powerful and brilliant club, meeting in the sumptuous rooms of the Palais Royal, and numbering among its members the most enlightened, most moderate, in a word most aristo-

cratic, of the revolutionary party. Doing all that he attempted thoroughly, Chénier entered into all their schemes with ardour and enthusiasm, was the life and soul of the society, till finally the post of secretary devolved upon him. Changing its title into the "Société des Amis de la Constitution," the club, dreading the excesses that everywhere were foreshadowed, established a journal of their own. Loving Republicanism with all the fervour of a poet's mind, no sooner were its glorious theories smutched and befouled with the taints of anarchy and the threatenings of murder, than he severed himself from those who like the high priests of the Druids thought to celebrate their doctrines, to inaugurate their new social religion, with the blood of many guiltless victims. He abated, however, not one single title of the grand and generous principles he had before professed; he clave to them ever with the same energy, spoke of them still with the same eloquence, but while proclaiming aloud the glorious theories of liberty, he attacked with a virtuous indignation the growing lust for anarchy. Was the birth-hour, the time of travail and labour-pangs, the moment for discord and riot and debauchery and murder, more hideous in their thoroughness than any the earth had yet suffered to fall upon her?

In No. 13 of the society's journal appeared the famous "Avis au Peuple français sur ses véritables Ennemis," signed by André Chénier. Reprinted in a pamphlet form and translated into English, German, and Polish, this *brochure* enjoyed, almost at once, an Euro-

pean circulation, even King Stanislaus sending the author a congratulatory letter with a medal of honour.

"When a great nation," he commences, "after having grown old in error and in carelessness, outwearied by miseries and oppressions, at last awakens from its long lethargy, and by a just and legitimate insurrection re-enters into all its rights, upsetting and reversing that order of things which has violated all, it cannot in a moment hope to find itself quietly and calmly established in that new state which must succeed the old. The strong impetus given to so powerful a mass causes it to vacillate a while before settling in equilibrium. In these times of tumult every human passion is aroused, and, as most men have strong passions and weak judgments, they all of them wish to do something, not for a moment knowing what should be done, and thus put themselves at the mercy of those clever scoundrels whom the wise man follows with his eyes, watching whither they are tending, noting their out-goings and their precepts, and finally unmasking the interested motives that animate all, and branding them as public enemies to the general weal."

The Revolution, he declared, was just, and must triumph by just means—the true enemies of liberty being those who wished to establish a hated and unjust tyranny. No invective, no imprudence even, was spared in this onslaught upon the partisans of violence:—

"I take some credit in deserving the esteem of men of worth, in thus offering myself to the hatred and the vengeance of these villains sprung from the gutter; these

corrupt professors of disturbance whom I have unmasked. I have thought to serve liberty in rescuing it from their praises. . . . . If, as I still hope, they will succumb to the weight of reason, it will be honourable to have contributed ever so little to their downfall. If they triumph, these are the men by whose hands it were better to be hanged than clasped as friends and comrades."

Even by his own party this manifesto was very coldly received. The hasty blood of the French nation is never in times of excitement to be cooled by advice, however gently given, and the moderation he here preached as an essential doctrine of brotherhood and liberty did but madden their stormy passions the more. The other editors of the paper seceded from him, and the journal ceased to appear. This quarrel with his party caused him to retire awhile, though still preserving his membership in the society. Not perhaps without a feeling of regret, he cries, "Disgusted with men and things, unknown and poor, and content with being so, I spend my days in retirement, in study, and in friendship." The end of 1790 and the first part of 1791 still belong to the poet. He laboured incessantly at the completion of his poems, and, though separated from the party of disorder, could not suppress his admiration for the glorious conquests of the Revolution, which he celebrated in glowing language in "Le Jeu de Paume," dedicated to his friend David, the painter. This was one of the two poems that appeared during his lifetime. With the ringing tones of Pindar, and the fiery spirit of the grand old Greeks, he sung their victories, and yet reproduced the ideas already expressed in "L'Avis."

But the hour had not yet come to give the world his poems, and he returned to prose. At the close of the year he presented himself to the electors of La Seine as a candidate for the public assembly, but André Chénier was scarcely the man to win the suffrages of a heated mob. He was too proud, too honest, too independent. He is said to have also at this time applied for the post of ambassador to Switzerland. The two defeats, however, were scarcely felt; he was one of those few men who are as far removed from personal ambition as they are from personal fear. France sorely needed earnestness, boldness, thoroughness, and outspokenness, and he was still willing, nay eager, to give up the quiet, which was to him only less dear than the art which it enabled him to cultivate, because he held that "every citizen is bound to this manner of a patriotic contribution of his views and his ideas to the common fund." When the new year commenced, poetry and study were set aside, and his time was entirely devoted to politics. From February to August his letters appeared at least once a week in the *Journal de Paris.*

In the feelings that animated his political inspirations during his short political career there is no tinge of ambition, no longing to snatch the power from weaker men by proving himself the stronger; there is only the healthy moral hatred of a man of cultivation and intelligence against brute strength and blatant street shriekings; of wisdom against utterest folly; of kindliness and honesty against rascality and infamous schemings.

André Chénier commenced his first continuous efforts

in politics on the 12th February, 1792, by an article in the *Journal de Paris*, attacking the ridiculous and indecent preface inserted by Manuel before the "Lettres de Mirabeau et de Sophie." Though in a manner a journalist he still preserved the independence of his views. Knowing nothing personally of the editors of the papers to which he contributed, he made use—then a common practice—of the convenient method of supplements, open to all who chose to pay, and boldly replied to those who insisted that there was a unity of fellowship between him and their editors, that "there exists no common bond, but that of those who arm twenty villages against a band of robbers." In the February of this year began that sad and deplorable dispute between the two brothers to which such sinister omen has too often been attached.

Joseph Chénier, younger than André, had, as we have before stated, long ago given himself up to the excitements and pleasures of a literary career. Possessed of but a tithe of his brother's talents, of not a whit of his genius, he had still less of his reticence and self-control, his avoidance of popularity and contemporary applause. Having commenced his career while still a boy with a wretched tragedy he had himself helped to hiss off the stage, he quickly perceived in the dawning revolution a means of gratifying self-love—of achieving distinction of some kind. While André, as a modest student, was silently studying the beauties of the past, forming a style and cultivating an imagination to ravish the future, Joseph was obtaining the noisy celebrity of a stage which had become little else than an arena for the stormy

political passions of the time. From a dramatist, he himself became an actor in the saddest tragedy even yet half played out, for letters eventually led him to the tribune. Some months since he had joined the society which under the full-blown title of "Jacobins" soon became so famous. Ever as it worstened, he constituted himself its defender, advocate, and pleader. André, on the contrary, seeing the excesses into which the members were falling, gradually withdrew from the coterie, and in his article of the 27th February, "Upon the Causes of the Disorders which trouble France, and which retard the Establishment of Liberty," declared that this society and all that depended on it were "Usurping brotherhoods, clasping each other by the hands, and forming an electric chain round France—a state within a state, with an organization which is the most complete system of disorganization which there ever has been on this earth:" that to these societies, and such as these, were due the disorders which checked the growth of real freedom—accusations, he declared, only to be denied by rascals or madmen. The club was incensed beyond measure, and Joseph, wounded in his self-love, sent a note to the *Journal de Paris*, declining all community of opinion with his brother. Here the dispute would probably have ended but for an editorial note commenting in injudicious language upon the letter. Joseph replied in the *Moniteur*, attacking André's article in tones more vigorous than brotherly, and André, to maintain his position, replied with a piquant allusion to his brother:—"Marie-Joseph may perhaps give much praise without much love to a

society which disposes of that portion of literary celebrity palatable to one greedy of the multitude's applause." Joseph, who had stood the general attack with tolerable equanimity, now wounded in his sorest pride as an author, retorted in the *Moniteur* that his brother's virtuous indignation was only the despite of a rejected candidate. The family then interfered, but it was long before the wound was healed, and if at the moment André was attacked by the violent party with the epithet of fratricide, this was a few years afterwards to be brutally retorted by the royalists.

André followed up this deplorable quarrel by another attack, infinitely graver in its consequences—being probably the eventual cause of his condemnation and death. Some soldiers of the Swiss Guard had been condemned two years before to the galleys for mutiny and for pilfering the regimental chest. They were now pardoned, and as an insult to the party of order, and as a bitter indignity, the Jacobins resolved to give the Guards a fête, in which the municipality was shameless enough to assist. André as a public writer, and as a gentleman who had worn the sword, and knew the religion of the standard, revolted from the idea. In letters slashing and bitter, yet full of a dignity which would have become a warrior in Xenophon's army, he denounced this outrageous prostitution of the public honour :—

"The public statues are to be veiled, forsooth, as this procession passes by! I say rather if these wretched orgies take place it is not the images of tyrants that should be covered, but the faces of all honest men; let

the army veil their eyes, lest they see what a reward indiscipline and revolt obtain! Let the whole country bow its head in shame and sorrow."

In letter after letter he attacked the scandalous Bacchanalian feast, and on the very day it took place he struck a higher chord still, for again a lyric poet, outraged with the shame of his fellow-countrymen, he published *L'Hymne aux Suisses de Château-vieux*, inimitable alike in irony and dignity. "Honour!" he cries "to the clients of Herbois! to Robespierre's forty cherished assassins," neither of them men to be attacked with impunity.

His brother and David—the one as author of the triumphal songs, the other as designer of the trophies—and many of his friends took part in the procession, but André fled from this scandalous feast of the Champs Elysées to the country, to breathe the pure air again, to again see Nature in her lovely stillness; to take in fresh vigour, if not fresh hope, for the struggle in which he stood between men for whom he had but little sympathy on the one hand, and men on the other whom he contemned and loathed.

Another letter, a few days later, tells of his return to Paris, and henceforth his daring had no bounds. As if the times were too bad for an honest man to live in, he seems, with a positive pleasure, to have courted a worthy death:—

"It is above all when the sacrifices that must be made to truth, to liberty, to fatherland, are dangerous and difficult that they are also accompanied with ineffable delights. It is in the midst of accusations, of

outrages, of proscriptions, it is in the dungeon and on the scaffold that virtue, probity, and constancy taste the full joy of a conscience pure and lofty."

His attacks became more personally direct; there was no traitor, no ignoble designer preparing to steep his hands in blood, whom he did not hold up to scorn and public execration under his proper name. Even friendship, sacred as he ever held it, was forgotten in this Roman-like sense of duty. The comrades of his youth and childhood—Le Brun and David—were attacked only less violently than the rest. But, at the same time, there was no unfortunate whose career he had not the courage to adopt. Opposing the King while in power, André now, with a rare delicacy and chivalry, congratulated him that, humiliated and insulted, he still maintained an honourable attitude:—

"May he read with pleasure these expressions of respectful esteem on the part of a man without interest as without ambition; a man who has never written one single line but under the dictates of his conscience, to whom the language of courtiers must for ever be unknown. As eagerly passionate as any for true equality, he would yet blush for himself if he now refused a signal homage to the virtuous actions by which our King has endeavoured to atone for all the miseries that so many other kings have entailed upon mankind."

These were dangerous sentiments to proclaim, and already Chénier's name circulated upon the private list that the President sent for approval to his followers. Day by day the whole of young France were deserting

to the opposite camp. He almost alone of the Republican party foresaw the heavy calamities with at all events any feeling of horror and aversion. Weaker and weaker his party grew, for few men now dared to speak their consciences aloud. Still, like a bugle blast for truth, for fatherland, for human love, in thrilling brazen notes, his voice rang out undauntedly :—

"Let all the citizens," he cries, "whose thoughts agree with the writer of these lines, and he has little doubt but that the whole of honest France is with him, at least break silence, for this is no time for silence. . . . Let us one and all raise a deafening clamour of truth and indignation!"

Under these labours, and the excitement that necessarily accompanied them, his health was beginning to break up, and in the midst of his work he was obliged sometimes to fly to the country for a few days' breathing time. Even at the beginning of August, in a week's walk through the laughing valleys of Normandy, he forgot something of the terrors of Paris—only a stray ray of light across a dismal evening: when he returned all Paris was in arms. The people were singing through the streets, howling for blood, for vengeance. Could nothing be done to stem the torrent? Now was the time for prompt action, not for brilliant writing! He rushed to the Assembly, and with all the lungs God gave him, tried to gain a hearing; but that one calming voice was drowned in the roaring hurricane of the Revolution. On the 10th of August his political struggles as a journalist were ended; the King was in prison; anarchy

stalked the open street; all free discussion was suppressed; the voice of truth was stifled. In weariness and impotence of spirit he retired from the battle.

In October, in reply to a question from a brother poet, Wieland, as to what part he had taken in the Revolution, André wrote that he was firmly determined to hold himself aloof, taking no active part in public matters, and attaching himself more than ever, in retirement, to the profound study of letters and ancient languages.

This was more than his resolution could maintain. At the end of the year the King's trial began, and in spite of the sure hatred and the certain vengeance that such a step involved, he begged M. de Malesherbes to let him share near the King the perils of the defence; and this, the first favour he had ever asked of the great, was granted. As Malesherbes' secretary the preparation of documents for the defence was entrusted to Chénier's hands: and when Louis XVI. was at length condemned to death, he prepared a letter of appeal to the people. This letter, dated 17th or 18th January, 1793, has the proof printed over the minutes in his own hand-writing, corrected in several places by M. Malesherbes. Eloquent with a noble fervour, it was unfortunately passed over by the King in favour of a simple note published in the *Moniteur*.

After the King's death the streets ran with blood; still André, at the risk of being assassinated, imprisoned, dragged to the scaffold, remained in a town from which all were flying as from a plague-stricken city. But his

friends, his family, and above all, his brother, prayed him to leave, and to their entreaties he at last yielded. For a few days he went to Rouen, but banishment at this distance from the centre of all his hopes was insupportable; and Joseph soon found him a secure retreat in a little cottage in a by-lane at Versailles, the district for which Joseph, still with the popular party, had just been elected deputy. In these days of miseries and misfortune, something of the old brotherly love returned again, as if in childhood, to dispel the rancour of the fierce quarrels, the recent bitter bickerings, though in politics they could never, of course, agree. As a further token of affection, Joseph dedicated to his brother the tragedy of "Brutus and Cassius."

For awhile retreat was very grateful. André's health had been terribly shattered from over-work, over-anxiety, over-excitement. It was a marvellous change this from the turbulent shrieking crowds of Paris to the peaceful silence of his hidden cottage, the green solitude of his walks. Fevered with the events just passed, it was essential to forget in some degree the wrongs and the passions of men. Though very ill and feeble, he took again lovingly to his old world of books; adding daily a learned and laborious note to the *Hermes*, polishing and completing his poems, and, mindful of untoward events that might perhaps occur, setting them in due order. It was a return to the days of youth, almost to the innocence of childhood. These were long, dreamy, delightful weeks given up entirely to poetry, to meditation, to love —for at last the poet had met his affinity; at last he was

understood; at last he loved with a passion that had in it neither phantasy nor lust.

Madame Pourrat, whose beauty and wit Voltaire admired of old, had, with her two daughters, taken refuge at Versailles, when the first threatenings of the tempest lowered over Paris, in her country-seat upon the green-crowned Lucienne Hill. Here all through the troublous times a little court of wit and beauty was maintained: and to this circle André, when he used to fly from Paris for a moment's breathing space, had ever been most welcome. The youngest of the two daughters, Madame Laurent Lecoulterne, had inherited the beauty, the charms and the graces of her mother. To the poet, heart-sick of the miseries around him, she brought the balm of smiling consolation, and brought unwittingly a love—totally unlike the fiery loves of his youth—a passion chaste and melancholy, hopeless yet not despondING, infinitely tender, but purified from all earthly lust. Such a passion is only possible to master-minds—in a Michael Angelo for a Vittoria Colonna, in a Dante for a Beatrice.

Beneath the cares and tender anxieties of "Fanny," in the delicacy of a new love for a lady who was at once a devoted wife, a timid, loving mother, he again took up his pen; how different now his Muse, how fair, how pure, how beautiful! The loveliest of all his poems, the "Ode to Versailles," was written at this period. It has such a subtle beauty, such a delicate rhythm of its own, standing apart from anything in French literature, from anything in the world's literature, that to attempt to

translate it would be almost profanation, certainly futile. We can only quote a portion of it in the original:—

" O Versailles, ô bois, ô portiques,
Marbres vivants, berceaux antiques,
Par les dieux et les rois Elysée embelli,
A ton aspect, dans ma pensée,
Comme sur l'herbe aride une fraîche rosée,
Coule un peu de calme et d'oubli.

. . . . . .

" Les chars, les royales merveilles,
Des gardes les nocturnes veilles,
Tout a fui; des grandeurs tu n'es plus le séjour:
Mais le soleil, la solitude,
Dieux jadis inconnus, et les arts, et l'étude,
Composent aujourd'hui ta cour.

. . . . . .

" L'abandon, l'obscurité, l'ombre,
Une paix taciturne et sombre,
Voilà tous mes souhaits. Cache mes tristes jours,
Versailles; s'il faut que je vive,
Nourris de mon flambeau la clarté fugitive,
Aux douces chimères d'amours.

. . . . . .

" J'aime; je vis. Heureux rivage!
Tu conserves sa noble image,
Son nom, qu'à tes forêts j'ose apprendre le soir,
Quand, l'âme doucement émue,
J'y reviens méditer l'instant où je l'ai vue,
Et l'instant où je dois la voir.

" Pour elle seule encore abonde
Cette source, jadis féconde,

Qui coulait de ma bouche en sons harmonieux.
Sur mes lèvres les bosquets sombres
Forment pour elle encore ces poétiques nombres,
Langage d'amour et des dieux.

. . . . . .

" Mais souvent tes vallons tranquilles,
Tes sommets verts, tes frais asiles,
Tout à coup à mes yeux s'enveloppent de deuil.
J'y vois errer l'ombre livide
D'un peuple d'innocents qu'un tribunal perfide
Précipite dans le cercueil."

His life, for the moment, was perfect happiness. There on the Lucienne Hill, in its pleasant shady woods, amidst the fragrance of spring's first flowers, the faint carol of the early singing birds, the babble and rushing of sylvan streams, would he take to her and her sister, in the cool calm evenings, the poems he had written in the morning. He almost lived with her family, for they all loved him only less than she did, and between these twain the passion was on either side a combination of the firmest friendship of manhood with the tenderest love of woman. All their interests were in common; he mourned as bitterly as any the untimely death of her child; he watched over her delicate health with a care that savoured of a womanly solicitude.

To them the outside world was like the Italian plague city; their inner circle a new and chaste Decameron party. Yet waftings of the terrible doings came hither from time to time; and when Marat fell beneath the poignard of Charlotte Corday, André, blushing for his own happiness at such a period, seized up a scathing

pen. "This famous ode breathes," says G. Planché, "an enthusiasm which has nothing fictitious; in each succeeding strophe we see that the author is singing, not as a poet engrossed by the literary beauty of his work, but with the indignant voice of a citizen, in the interest of imperious duty; full of the memories of old Greek odes—without the faintest trace of art, most artistically beautiful." "Thou alone," cried Chénier, "wast a man! Thou has avenged humanity; whilst we unmanned, unsexed, a soulless herd of poltroons, repeated only a thousand womanly and plaintive cries, for our trembling hands were too weak to grasp the dagger!"

Human blood was still flowing in Paris, every hour was burthened with crimes, every house in mourning, every other man a human fiend; but, despairing that his efforts would be of no avail, André kept to his studies and his retirement. As time wore on, the longing to be again in Paris became overpowering. Partially re-established in health, and either careless of events, or thinking that in the sweeping changes his name had been forgotten, he returned to Paris, keeping still, however, in careful solitude. Had this secresy been maintained all might yet have gone well, even at Paris; but he was too full of solicitude for his friends to have any personal fears. Early in March, 1794, he heard that M. Pastoret, who had been one of the phalanx to battle for law and liberty, had been arrested. André flew to the house at once to offer consolation and what assistance he could to the sorrowing family. While on this kindly visit a band

of officials arrived, who seized all the papers, and, recognising André, declared he was one of the six thousand "suspected" on their list, and carried him straightway to the prison of the Luxembourg; here the gaoler refused to receive him without a regular warrant. But at Saint-Lazare they were less scrupulous, and here for the night he was lodged.

The unfortunate family received the tidings of his seizure at the very moment they heard that his eldest brother, Sauveur, had likewise just been captured. Old M. de Chénier, distracted with alarm, ran off to the *Comité* of Public Safety, demanding in the name of an innocent father the liberation of an innocent son. Barrère, one of the members, formerly an old friend, promised that the request should at once be granted. But next day André's name was formally entered in the prison books, Barrère's friendship extending only so far as to cause the name to be written at the end of the list. There was no hope henceforth but oblivion in the crowd, for his freedom now required a regular order from the National Assembly, and there all the leaders were his personal enemies—for he had sung the heroism of Charlotte Corday, had lashed the evil ambition of Collot d'Herbois with the cutting venom of indignant satire, had dauntlessly attacked Robespierre, who feared his talents, and, himself a poetaster, looked upon his acknowledged genius with greedy envy and smouldering hatred. In the mean time the poor old father was uneasily moving heaven and earth to procure his son's liberty, rushing about with frantic fears, invoking the laws, calling aloud

to the God of Truth and Justice for aid and succour. Joseph, himself a member of the *Comité*, but insulted even in the tribune, did what he could, but his efforts were futile; and he now confined his attention to the difficult task of repressing his father's endeavours.

For three months André had to bear this prison life, not altogether unpleasant in itself, for the captives had probably a far less wretched time of it than their anxious friends outside.

St. Lazare had formerly been a priory; above the door, upon a slab of black marble, was written, in large white letters, the motto of the Republic, the epitaph of those immured :—

> "Unité, Indivisibilité de la République,
> Egalité, Fraternité—ou la Mort."

Never was the careless gaiety of the French character better exemplified, nor its aptitude for pleasure in every situation in life. Within the prison walls he found the very same society that he had so often met in his mother's brilliant circle. It was the same world of rank and beauty, wit and genius, transported intact to the dungeons—the same old *salon*, its futilities, its graces and its faults, its loves, its hatings and its jealousies, its grand aims and its petty. The first sudden seizure had of course been painful, but in the early days of their captivity the prisoners were allowed all the luxuries they chose to pay for—a subscription list was opened, to which the wealthy contributed to aid the poor; the tables were well served, and they were permitted pretty

constant intercourse with their friends of the outer world. But by degrees their pleasures were taken from them as too great a solace, and then, as Da Broca eloquently describes the scene :—

"A multitude of ladies, married or betrothed, assembled in the garden, crowding together, together gazing eagerly in the hope of seeing their lovers or their husbands for one moment at the windows ;—to give, to receive, a look, a gesture—a fleeting token of ineffable affection. No weather banished these women from the gardens, neither the extremes of heat or cold, nor the tempests of wind and rain. Some were as motionless as statues ; others worn out with fatigue and watching, as soon as those they yearned for appeared, fell senseless to the ground. One would come with a new-born child in her arms, bathing it with tears in her husband's sight. Another lady, disguised as a beggar, would sit the whole day long at the foot of a tree, where she could be seen by her husband. The misery of these poor women was extremest when a high fence was erected round the prison, and they were forbidden to remain stationary at any one spot. Then might they be seen wandering like shades through the dark and melancholy avenues of the gardens, casting eager, wistful looks at the impenetrable prison walls."

The deprivation of their friends' company rendered the prisoners all the more dependent upon their own society. A code of rules was drawn up ; the married ladies in rotation acted as housekeepers ; the services of the domestics were shared ; the sitting-rooms were all in common.

All went on as in a fashionable *salon;* the women dressed as ever; ties of friendship, love, and pleasure were formed. Every one contributed to the common fund of amusement. Musicians gave concerts; poets recited their verses aloud, vying with each other to heap indignities upon the *canaille* by whom they were imprisoned, and nevertheless, with a noble enthusiasm, singing the exploits of the French army, which was then ranging France against the world. Softening by art the rigours of captivity, feasting and flirting, happy and careless, never was there such a scene before. When in spite of all this the time hung heavily upon their hands, they had other resources, ghastly and terrible in their light mockery and parody of their impending fate. M. Thiers has given us a description of one of these games; Alfred de Vigny, in that marvellous book "Stello," has given us another. Though appearing in a romance there is no doubt of its comparative truthfulness:—

"I saw at one end of the table a small group amusing themselves with a game of cards. Their soft voices, their reserved and polished tones, told me at once that they belonged to the highest rank of society. They bowed to me from their seats, but rose when they saw the Duchess de Saint-Aignan. We passed on. At the other end of the table was a much larger group—younger and livelier—bustling, noisy, and laughing—a gathering as of a court dancing party *en négligé* on the morrow of the ball. There were young ladies seated to the right and to the left of their chaperons; there were young men whispering in each other's ears, pointing out this or that

with the finger of scorn or jealousy. We could hear stifled laughter and song-airs, and snatches of dance-music, and dance-steps and glidings to clapping hands by way of castagnets and triangles. They had formed a circle, and all were gazing at something that passed in the middle of the thronging crowd. This something caused at first a moment's silence and attention, and then a ringing outburst of blame and of enthusiasm, of murmurs of applause or disapprobation, as if after a good scene or a bad. A head would suddenly be seen and then as suddenly disappear. 'It is some innocent game,' said I, slowly going round the large square table. Madame de Saint-Aignan stopped, leant upon the table, and relinquished my arm to press her girdle with her other hand —her customary gesture. 'O my God! do not go near them; it is their horrible game again,' she exclaimed; I have so begged them not to play it any more. Where could they have learnt it? It is an unheard-of bravado. But I will stay here while you go and look on.' I left her sitting on the bench, and went to see what I could. It by no means displeased me as much as it did her. On the contrary, I admired this prison game, comparable only to the exercises of the gladiators. Indeed, without taking matters as gravely and weightily as the ancients, France has sometimes as much philosophy. We are all, from father to son, Romans in our first boyhood; and we have never ceased to build us altars, and to worship before the same shrines to which our fathers prayed. We have all of us at school applauded the game of 'dying with grace,' which even the slaves of the Roman people

practised. And here I saw these other poor slaves of a sovereign people do as much, without any pretence or affectation, laughing, jesting, saying a thousand mocking words of their ignoble masters. 'It is your turn now, Madame de Périgord,' said a young gallant in a garb of blue silk, slashed with white; 'show us how you can mount!' 'Let us see what you can show,' cried another. 'Order! order!' exclaimed they all; 'you are too free with your tongue, sir, and it is bad style!' 'Bad style as much as you like,' said the accused; 'but the game was invented to show us which of the ladies could mount most captivatingly.' 'What childish folly,' whispered a pretty woman of thirty. 'I certainly won't mount at all if the chair is not better placed!' 'Oh! oh! Madame de Périgord, it is a shame!' exclaimed another; 'in our roll-call Sabine Vonville comes before you! Ah! mount as a Sabine, let us see!' 'Luckily I am not in Sabine costume.' 'But where shall I put my feet?' said the young lady, embarrassed. Peals of laughter, as every one advanced, stooped, gesticulated, showed, pointed. 'There ought to be a plank here.'—'No, there.'—'Three feet high.'—'Only two.'—'No, not so high as the chair.'—'Lower still.'—'I am sure you are wrong.'—'Who lives will see.'—'Nay, who dies will see!'—and ringing laughter again. 'You spoil the game,' said a grave gentleman seriously put about, and eyeing the young lady's feet. 'Well, come, tell me all the conditions,' urges Madame de Périgord in the midst of the group. 'I have to mount upon the machine?' 'Machine! upon the stage,' interrupted another girl. 'Well, upon what you

like to call it,' continued the first, and without raising her dress more than two inches above her ankles—'Ah! here I am,' and jumping into the chair she rested there a moment. General applause. 'And after that?' she asked. 'Afterwards?—oh, that's no affair of yours,' replied one. 'Afterwards? click! click!' laughed a burly gaoler. 'Afterwards? oh! don't you harangue the people,' said a young nun; 'there's nothing in worse taste.'—'And nothing more useless,' added I. . . . 'Ah, now we shall see something,' they shouted on all sides. A young, a very young, lady advanced with the elegance of an Athenian girl towards the centre of the circle. . . . Her regular profile, her grave mouth, her jet black eyes, and her eyebrows, severe and arched, after the manner of Circassian women, had in them something determined and original, which touched and shamed us all. It was Mdlle. de Coigny; she whom I had seen praying to God in the prison yard. She seemed to think with pleasure upon all she did herself, not at all of what those who were gazing at her were doing. She advanced with the sparklings of joy in her eyes. I love to see that at sixteen or seventeen. It is the best possible innocence. This joy, so to speak, electrified the worn faces of the prisoners. This was, indeed, the 'Young Captive' who was 'not willing to die yet.' Her very air said—

'Ma bienvenue au jour me rit dans tous les yeux!'

and

'L'illusion féconde habite dans mon sein.'

She was in the very act of mounting. 'Oh, not you, not

you!' cried a young man, in a grey dress, whom I had not remarked before, coming out of the crowd. 'Do not mount, I beg, I pray you!' She stopped, gave a little shrug of her shoulders, like a pettish child, and put her finger on her lips. She regretted the guillotine-chair, and peeped at it sideways. At this moment some one said—'But Madame de Coigny is there.' Directly, with a quick presence of wit, and a rare delicacy of good sense, they took down the chair, broke up the circle, and formed a little quadrille, to hide from her this singular repetition of the drama of the *Place de la Révolution.*"

And thus they played their game through all the least details, even to the shades of the departed coming back, dressed ghost-like in a table-cloth, telling the horrors of hell, and prophesying the ruin of their iniquitous judges, dragging them from their lofty seats into the abyss of some dark recess. And in the midst of all the gaoler at any moment would call out the names of those who were wanted for the actual drama of which this was but the rehearsal. "It was thus," says Rioffe, "that upon the bosom of death, we spoke the truth boldly in our prophetic pastimes, in the midst of spies and traitors."

To Chénier—a poet, a thinker, a dreamer—the scene must have been strangely painful, but even to him the imprisonment had its pleasures. Suvée, the artist, beguiled the tedium by painting the poet, and thus handing down his features to posterity. The two brothers Trudaine, the friends of his boyhood, were there, and they continued the old poetic studies of bygone times. They sang again the woods of Montigny, of Italy, of Greece

and recalled the happy days when the poet, careless of the hand of Fortune, had cried out merrily, "we are three to one against her!" Among the noble women, the beautiful young girls, who shed a perfume of hope and love through these gloomy dungeons, there was one whose fate excited all the poet's pity and compassion. This was the Duchess de Fleury, better known as Mdlle. Aimée de Coigny. Her youth—she was but sixteen—her beauty, her light, exquisite wit, her childish dread

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"Qu'un stoïque aux yeux durs vole embrasser la mort,
Moi je pleure et j'espère; au noir souffle du nord
Je plie et relève ma tête.
S'il est des jours amers, il en est de doux!
Hélas! quel miel jamais n'a laissé de dégoûts?
Quelle mer n'a point de tempête?

"L'illusion féconde habite dans mon sein.
D'une prison sur moi les murs pèsent en vain,
J'ai les ailes de l'espérance:
Echappée aux réseaux de l'oiseleur cruel,
Plus vive, plus heureuse, aux compagnes du ciel
Philomèle chante et s'élance.

"Est-ce à moi de mourir? Tranquille je m'endors
Et tranquille je veille, et ma veille aux remords
Ni mon sommeil ne sont en proie.
Ma bienvenue au jour me rit dans tous les yeux;
Sur des fronts abattus mon aspect dans ces lieux
Ranime presque de la joie.

. . . . . .

"O mort, tu peux attendre; éloigne, éloigne-toi!
Va consoler les cœurs que la honte, l'effroi,
Le pâle désespoir dévore.
Pour moi Palès encore a des asiles verts,
Les amours des baisers, les muses des concerts,
Je ne veux pas mourir encore."

of death, all spoke to the poet's heart; and this delicate mixture of pity and love, consoling his captivity and hers, produced "La Jeune Captive." "This," says Villemain, "is one of the *chefs d'œuvres* of modern poetry, the purest of tender elegies, written in a style whose richness has something of the smiles and freshness of youth." The young captive, even in the prison, is so full of this innocent happiness of youth that she is not ready to die :—

"Let a stoic with tearless eyes hastily clutch at death,
But I with my tears and prayers at the chilly North wind's breath
Will shiver and hide and flee.
There may be sorrowful days, but then there are hours of joy—
Ah! was there ever a sweet but sooner or late must cloy—
Or ever a stormless sea?

"Illusions and hopes and dreams are fluttering thro' my brain,
Till the dreary dungeon walls would fetter my soul in vain;
For I borrow me airy wings;
O joy for heaven's free air, as merrily up I fly,
Away from the snarer's nets, to the blue fields of the sky,
Where Philomel soaring sings!

"Why should I die so young, when the lingering, peaceful years,
Full of soft lulling delights are waiting to still my tears
In their dreamless depths profound.
Laughing his love in my eyes, my darling kissed me to-day,
Till my own joy overflows, to conjure and sooth away
The sorrows of all around.

. . . . . .

"O Death! thou canst wait awhile, for a moment let me hide,
There are weary hearts eno', whose dolorous shame and pride
Hail thee with pitiful cry;
For me the summer has still such tremulous green delights,
And Love such soft caresses, and my songs such wild delights,
That I do not wish to die!"

But it was not love alone that inspired the poet in his imprisonment. In his burning indignation he again and again attacked the enemies of France with terrible energy. He, too, did "not wish to die," "sans percer, sans fouler, sans flétrie dans les fanges ces bourreaux, harbouler de lois," without surviving these abhorred brigands long enough "pour cracher sur les noms, pour chanter leur supplice."

Here in the midst of spies and gaolers he had the same haughty disdain for safety; he wrote with the same sweeping audacity as formerly in the columns of the *Journal de Paris*, and these things were noted to be hereafter brought against him—not that there was much utility now in proofs of either guilt or innocence. Among his papers was found a strange document; a kind of will, in which he describes himself faithfully before his conscience and before futurity.

"He is weary of sharing the shame of that vast crowd who, abhorring in secret as much as he can, yet by their silence, at least, encourage and approve these atrocious men and these abominable actions. Life itself is not worth so much opprobrium. When the shambles, the taverns, and the brothels vomit out their thousands of legislators, of magistrates, of generals of armies, upspringing from the mud for their poor country's good, he has in him a vastly other ambition, and he does not believe that his country will one day think it amiss to say, 'This land which produced so many prodigies of imbecility and vileness, produced also a little band of men who renounced neither their reason nor their conscience;

witnessing the triumphs of vice, they remained faithful to virtue, and did not blush at being men of standing. In those times of violence they dared to speak of justice; in those times of utterest folly they dared to weigh matters calmly; in those times of the most abject hypocrisy they never feigned to be scoundrels so as to purchase their repose at the cost of oppressed innocence. They concealed not their hate from those assassins who spared nothing to reward their friends, to pay their enemies—for both cost them only crimes; and one named A. C. was among the five or six whom neither the general frenzy, nor greed, nor cowardice could cause to bend the knee before these crowned assassins, to touch hands sullied with murder, to seat themselves at a table where men were drinking the blood of brothers!' "

Amid the prison gaieties and love-making—though as the weeks rolled on their pleasures were one by one debarred—Chénier found time to think of his past writings:—

> "Mes parents, mes amis, l'avenir, ma jeunesse,
> Mes écrits imparfaits."

And he set himself carefully to put them forth and complete them as far as he could. Not, however, having the MS. at hand he was compelled to work from memory. He wrote a preface for the volume he could never hope to see published. All this work was written on small scraps and slips of paper in characters so fine that they could scarcely be read without a glass; when completed he concealed them carefully in the soiled linen which those at home were still allowed to collect.

In the mean time the unfortunate family were still praying for his deliverance. Joseph was now obliged to change his abode every night, and yet he clearly saw that Robespierre's days were numbered, that a week or two gained would be the salvation of his brother. More and more forcibly he endeavoured to impress the necessity of inaction upon his father; but the poor old man was weary of waiting, sick to the death of his deferred hopes. How could he be calm, he argued to himself, when two of his sons were in prison, when the life of one was in imminent danger. Without saying a word to the family he addressed a petition to the Council—"from an irreproachable father who claims an irreproachable son, deprived for months of his liberty, but who never merited its loss." At first this step consoled his troubles; he thought to rescue his son, and then to triumphantly present him to the family. The petition was not answered, and in spite of Joseph's cheering declarations that the counter-revolution which was to overthrow Robespierre was making immense strides, he again began to fret at this inaction which seemed to him so like indifference.

At last he went secretly to see Barrère, who received him coldly and with evasive replies. On the 3rd Thermidor (21st July) he tried to consult André as to what steps could be taken, but he was refused admission to the prison. On the morrow he again visited Barrère, and the wretch, wearied of him and his plaints, said with a cruel significance, "Leave me now, monsieur, leave me, your son shall come forth in three days from Saint-Lazare." Upon this third day the public accuser made

out by instructions the act of accusation against André Chénier.

For many years it was maintained that Joseph had shown great indifference about his brother's fate, that if, even as one of his defenders says, "he had done something, he had not done enough." Rumours of a deeper dye, too, were afloat, and a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* for March, 1821, declares that the facts alleged against Joseph had never been disproved, and communicates them on the authority "of a person who had long been a friend of the family, who had sheltered André Chénier while persecuted by the Revolution, and enjoyed the confidence of his father until his death." The reviewer's narrative is as follows:—

"He was condemned to die two days before the fall of Robespierre. In the interval between his condemnation and execution his father flew to the Convention, and in one of the adjoining apartments found Joseph C., surrounded by some of his most ferocious colleagues. There he fell upon his knees to implore mercy from one of his sons to the other. Marie Joseph rose from his seat, and leaning his head on his hand on the chimney, remained mute and motionless, while Robespierre himself seemed to wait for one word from him to grant his brother's pardon. But that word Joseph Chénier did not utter, even when the old man, rising from his knees with all the energy of despair, cried out in a voice of thunder, 'Je te donne ma malédiction!' and burst out of the room. André Chénier was guillotined the next day; and his father, upon whose authority this story rests, died of

grief. . . . . It is said, long after the murder of André Chénier, a letter was by some means or other daily conveyed to his brother, containing merely these words:—

'Cain! Cain! qu'as-tu fait de ton frère?'

Joseph died a natural death in 1813, pursued by shame—not by remorse."

It is a painful story to quote, worth quoting, however, as it was generally believed, but from all evidence, external and direct, utterly and entirely false.

On the morning of the 6th Thermidor—three days after M. de Chénier's last appeal—there was an unusual stir within the prison walls. About midday the heavy cars—too well known, alas!—were driven into the court-yard, but it was not until the evening that the fatal list was read over—none who heard their names once called ever returned—and at the head of the death-roll stood the name of André Chénier. It was a moment of eternal farewells, laden with all the bitterness of death; of the severing of those ties that in the weariness of prison-life had become as love and friendship. André threw himself into the arms of the brothers Trudaine, who were left behind only to survive for a day, and then the gloomy *cortége* started for the Conciergerie, where Fouquier Tinville sat in judgment. They were too late for trial that evening, and there was thus one night's respite.

Early in the morning of the 7th Thermidor (25th July) he appeared at the bar of the tribunal, with forty-four other prisoners. They were allowed to make no

defence. A collective accusation was read, an individual statement and an individual interrogation rapidly slurred over, and after two short hours of these formal mockeries thirty-eight of the accused were condemned. At the top of the death-roll stood the names of Roucher, the poet, and of André Chénier. They were found guilty of "having declared themselves enemies of the people, of having taken part in the plots and conspiracies of 'Capet and his family,' of keeping up intelligence with the foes of the Republic, of writing against liberty and in defence of tyranny." In André's case a further charge was added of having satirized the fête given to the Swiss guard—this was the work of his powerful enemy, Collot d'Herbois. The sentence was "Instant Death."

The trial was over at midday—the executions were to take place in the afternoon or evening, When, wondered the prisoners, when would the hour arrive! Ah, in those stormy times men were attuned to heroic living —to heroic dying. There were mutual confidences, mutual encouragements; last wishes, last hopes, last prayers; not in the silent gloom of a night before execution, but in the full glory of a July sun streaming through the prison bars, as if to remind them all how beautiful, how happy was the life they were leaving. Now it was in his death-hour, face to face with the pallid spectre, that André wrote what must, from its genesis, ever be the most pathetic of his poems :—*

* "Composé le 7 Thermidor, 1794, au matin, peu d'instants avant d'aller au supplice."

"Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zéphyre
Anime la fin d'un beau jour,
Au pied de l'échafaud j'essaie encore ma lyre,
Peut-être est-ce bientôt mon tour ;
Peut-être avant que l'heure en cercle promenée
Ait posé sur l'émail brillant
Dans les soixante pas où sa route est bornée,
Son pied sonore et vigilant,
Le sommeil du tombeau pressera ma paupière !
Avant que de ses deux moitiés
Ce vers que je commence ait atteint la dernière,
Peut-être en ces murs effrayés
Le messager de mort, noir recruteur des ombres,
Escorté d'infâmes soldats,
Remplira de mon nom ces longs corridors sombres."

. . . . . .

A fragment like his life—a glorious, beautiful fragment interrupted by the advent of the guard. It was no time then for fear or shrinking. Women and young girls cheered each other onward; men did not dare to be craven. Far from friends and lovers they clave each to the other. At last, a little before six, the heavy cars drew up. Human life was over, and it befitted all to commence the life immortal with the glory of an heroic death. All was over, yet as he walked up the waggon steps, André gave one last regret to his broken life. "To die, to die! and yet I had something there!" he cried, striking his forehead with his hand. It was the Muse, says Chateaubriand, who in this supreme hour revealed to him his genius.

He was placed upon the same bench as that other unfortunate poet Roucher. Then the cars drove off through a crowd eager for excitement, utterly callous to

"As the sun's last flashing ray,
As the last cool breeze from the shore,
Cheer the close of a dying day,
Thus I strike my lyre once more.
As now by the scaffold I wait
Each moment of time seems the last,
For the clock, like a finger of Fate,
Points onwards and onwards fast.
Perchance ere the hand goes round,
Perchance ere I hear the beat
Of the measured and vigilant sound
Of its sixty sonorous feet,
The sleep of the tomb will close
On my wearied lids and eyes,
Before each thronging thought that glows
Can have taken fitting guise,
And One, bearing death in his hand,
Like a grim recruiter of shades,
Will come with his murderous band,
And, amid the clangour of blades,
Fill all these gloomy corridors
With resoundings of my name."

. . . . . .

misfortune—fed daily on bloodshed and massacres, yelling for ever for fresh victims—a crowd insensate, many-headed, brutal, hurling jeers and curses at the prisoners as they passed. Some few wearied with an over-glut of horrors averted their faces and turned aside. None dared to do more, few dared so much. And still the cars drove on; the two poets meeting at every halt the eyes of a sorrowing friend, who was attending them as at their funeral. As to drowning men, to dying men stricken with any sudden death, the thoughts, the events of a whole life crowd into a moment's space, so true to the dreams of their boyhood and their manhood, to the

soul-life that could never be guillotined or trampled out, their last thoughts were of poetry and friendship. Let the mob shriek out and surge around with brutal insults to their courage and their innocence! Let the scaffold with its blood-stained axe and bloodier basket loom before! What was that now to them? The pangs of death were over! Quietly amidst the roar they repeated one to the other, the first scene of *Andromaque*;—André commencing,—

> "Oui, puisque je retrouve un ami si fidèle,
> Ma fortune va prendre une face nouvelle,
> Et déjà son courroux semble s'être adouci
> Depuis qu'elle a pris soin de nous rejoindre ici."

At last the Place de la Révolution was reached, and they mounted the scaffold, still congratulating each other that it were better to die than to live in fiendish days like these. A last grasp of the hand, a last fond dispute as to which should die first, so as to spare the other the horror of seeing a friend butchered, a last look of pride and pity upon the seething crowd below, and all tyranny and wrong and injustice were over for evermore.

"It is so beautiful to die young," so sweet to die for one's country, to give a world of enemies and haters a victim without reproach, to surrender to Almighty God a life still full of the innocent illusions of youth. So died André Chénier on the 25th July, 1794, in the thirty-second year of his age.

Three days after this, at this same Place de la Révolution perished his murderer Robespierre. But three days only, and André Chénier would have been saved!

On the following morning Joseph saw the dreadful intelligence for the first time in the daily papers. His agony and grief were terrible. Uttering nothing but sobs and imprecations, looking nothing but despairs and miseries, he rushed to his brother Sauveur's fiancée, and flinging himself at her feet sobbed, with his face in his hands, "They have killed him! they have killed him!" Madame Landais, pale and motionless as death, stammered, "Who? who?"—"My brother."—"Which of them?"—"André." Madame Landais clasped her hands in prayer. The dreary silence was broken by Joseph—"Oh! how can I announce it to my father, to my mother! Let us go together at once."

His drawn features, his bloodshot and swollen eyes drew from old M. de Chénier an exclamation of affright. "My God? what has happened?" "Which is it, speak! Tell us of this new misery?" cried the poor mother, clutching hold of Madame Landais with feeble, trembling arms. Joseph made a superhuman effort, and stuttered in a broken voice, "André has just appeared at the tribunal." Madame de Chénier threw herself into Madame Landais' arms, shrieking, "Oh, my God! my God!" M. de Chénier, with a heart thumping through his breast, with unutterable dread in his voice, articulated, "Eh! eh! well?" Joseph remained silent, but the unfortunate old man comprehended only too quickly. Raising his feeble arms towards the sky, he cried in despair, "The murderers! it was this they promised me when they said 'three days!'" Joseph, who was supporting his father, recoiled in affright. "They have

promised you?—who? What do you mean? You have presented a request to whom—when—how?" Then the unhappy father told what he could of his unbearable despair, of his secret petition, his stolen interview. Joseph, maddened with grief and frenzy, cursed his father as a murderer, hurling reproaches at him. "My son! my son! do not overwhelm me with woe! Oh, wretch! Oh, misery!" Then the son as wildly as before begged his father's forgiveness, and again their tears were mingled.

After Robespierre's death Joseph Chénier recovered his influence in the Assembly, and through his efforts Sauveur was eventually saved. But their father had received his death-blow; he survived André only ten months.

Having published but two short poems up to the time of his death, and those in an ephemeral form, André Chénier was yet acknowledged by all who knew him to be possessed of the rarest genius. Six months after his execution—a time still poignant with melancholy memories—"La Jeune Captive" was published in the *Decade* with this editorial note—"André Chénier had studied much, written much, but published very little. Few of us are sufficiently aware what irreparable loss poetry, philosophy, and ancient erudition have sustained by his death."

This was followed by the publication in the newspapers of two or three other pieces. But it must ever remain a stigma upon his brother Joseph—himself a literary man, and something at all events of a poet—that

amidst his own ephemeral labours he did not make time to fulfil the pious duties of an editor to the poems in his possession, the worth of which he had certainly sufficient critical knowledge to perceive. Still he did not conceal the manuscripts. Far from it; they were lent only too readily, to be soiled, torn, and stolen. They were repeatedly copied and quoted, and, in one or two instances, pilfered to make other reputations. And in that small and precious circle whose applause is worth the praise of a world of professional critics, André's genius was acknowledged—among the most fervent of his admirers being Chateaubriand. By degrees the shorter poems and fragments found their way into print. But it remained for M. Daunon, to whom they had been bequeathed by Joseph, to publish them collectively. The editorship of the volume was entrusted to M. Latouche. From the surviving brother he received some further poems, and he did his pleasant duty well—almost too zealously, for he suppressed some short pieces for fear of marring a reputation already made.

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THE END.

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